



# CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

## CHAPTER I

### A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

CYRUS ARCHER was no fool ; and the wiser professors of his college knew this, realising that if he won no medals for knowledge of what you might call the skeleton side of things, he could comprehend an idea. It was not, of course, the place of even the discerning ones amongst them to say to him, with a tap on the back to cheer him over his lack of prizes : "Don't you worry, Cyrus Archer, though you can't remember the date of a battle, and the text-book phrasing, and ponderosity of a fact that actually is as easy to you as falling off a log!"—for professors don't talk that way.

Even the professor of history, however,

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## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

did notice that, though he could never give this young man marks for remembering whether Bunker Hill came after or before Columbus (to exaggerate slightly, so as to give our point without much ado), Cyrus could write of the landing of Columbus with that touch of intimacy that might make you think he had been Columbus's steward, and recreate the atmosphere of Bunker Hill as if he had been perched on top of it, hugging his knees, and rubber-necking round every way for a comprehensive view. The professor of history noticed that; yet, when he mentioned, discussing college at the monthly dinner, to the professor of literature: "That young man, Cyrus Archer, should do something in your realms," the professor of literature replied, with a little twist of his mouth and doubtful curl of his nostrils, as though the entrée or fish was high: "Got the making of a good journalist, perhaps. Can give a picture—yes. But a bit florid," which is the kind of series of remarks to which only a man keen on dispute thinks it worth while to respond.

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

The thing was topsy-turvy. The professor of history knew that the student in question did not get a fair running sequence of hard facts, apt and pat—was unable to respond to the tune of a decent number of marks, say ninety-five out of a hundred, to such questions as : "When did the Ark go aground on Ararat ?" or to : "Give the name of the bungalow, in the garden of which a celebrated youth said : 'I did it, father, with my little hatchet !'" Yet, though the professor of history knew the young man couldn't do that sort of stunt well, he would never have called him superficial. If asked to write about that beaching on Ararat, Cyrus would have hunted out detail, even down to whether the famous bird was rock or wood pigeon ; and he would not merely have mentioned the fact—he would have given you the very flutter of its wings, and shown you old Noah crying : "Here he comes !" and putting a little hemp-seed out on the landing board. The professor thought there was something in the boy beyond slick journalism, but had to admit that he was lacking in the gifts of the

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

scholiast ; he could so easily be caught out. Nevertheless he let the matter go with : " Oh well, perhaps you are right " ; for part of the scheme of this monthly dinner was to establish pleasant relations between the savants of the college.

The professor of mathematics, who gave to his subject a passionate devotion, felt annoyance at Cyrus Archer ; and on occasion later, having overheard a bit of this dubious praise, recalled it at a moment when the young man was making an ass of himself over logarithms. A splenetic element entered into his devotion, and with an expression on his face that seemed lacking in culture he snapped : " You have not tried to master the subject. I suppose your favourite quotation from literature to write in Melinda's album is : ' Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. ' "

" The end of Gray's Poem on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," said Cyrus Archer promptly, with the faintest twinkle ; which infuriated the professor of mathematics.

There you are—it was all upside down. He could only answer the questions he was

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

not asked! Even the daughter of his father's partner, a girl to whom he was engaged, partly because she was pretty, and partly because both her family and his seemed to expect it of them, understood him but little; so that eventually, this sort of thing persisting, college days over—and chiefs and bosses on the firm all appearing to have the same view of him as the professors, a view summed up in: "Clever young fellow that, but I don't know! Seems to side-track!"—he went West. Yet, if you had asked him who said: "Go West, young man, go West," he would only have looked worried, and answered: "Now, hang it all—who *did* say that? If you really want to know particularly I can look it up for you."

He had, in the East, candidly tried to make himself conversant with the way things ran. So he did out West; and having decided that the axial theory there (or, as they say, the great scheme) was to look around, see what people wanted that they did not have, then give it to them, when he heard two or three men in the hotel at

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Skookum City ask for tomatoes, which the management could not supply, he said to himself : " I'm going to make a fresh start here. I'm going to get on in this world. I shall raise them tomatoes even at this high altitude." He had gone to Skookum City because it was (in various senses of the phrase) the last place to go to. It had seemed to him a hopeful spot in which to make a fresh start, and, besides, it was near a big Reservation, and he was interested in the Indian. " I shall raise them tomatoes, which evidently even the Chinamen round here ignore ; and I shall charge them tomato prices. I shall do it by aid of a sun-fronting fence and sheets of glass between them and the sun."

So he removed ninety miles away (the distance being decreed by the prices of land and the state of his banking account, weighed one against the other), to Skookum Creek, which was a " flag-station " on the new spur-line over the mountains to Saghalie, and could also be reached by what the buoyant boost-writers call, to the wry delight of teamsters who use such roads and chance

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

upon the boosters' efforts, "a fine wagon-road," or even, upon occasion, "a good automobile road." There he bought a piece of land and started upon his great scheme. Well — you're wrong, for the tomatoes weren't a failure. The tomatoes were all right, but the last of his spare money went in shed, fence, tomatoes, and the glass; and though his instinct, while the fruit was a-growing, was all to sit on a stump and discuss things that didn't matter with Lazy Lake or with Lame Knee (who, in return for a smile, and a "How-do!" would chatter gutturally to him), he must bestir himself while the tomatoes were coming up, or he wouldn't have smokes for himself, let alone the discursive Lake and the meditative Indian.

He could drive a horse. Perhaps he didn't look like it, but anyhow when he applied for the job of driving ore down from the Jessie Debrett Mine to the Concentrator, the teaming boss, rolling his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, gave him that sidewise look, and the inevitable question: "Can you handle horses?"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Try me!"

The boss elevated his head, indicating the mountain slopes with his chin and the cigar-tip, and as that did not seem enough to shake the confidence of the young man, he raised a hand, pointed to the slopes and let the hand drop again. Evidently more than pantomime was required, for Cyrus Archer merely looked at him.

"You see the curves on that road?" asked the boss. "There's worse out of sight, and a shoe on the wheel ain't going to be much use to you. You can't do sledging in mud. It's *drivin'*, it's handlin' hoses every inch of the way. Five miles of curves and loops."

Cyrus remembered much advice on how to get on.

"I can loop the loop," he boasted.

"I give you a chance, then, right here in this stable yard. I was going up with that there team myself. One of my men"—he turned and wagged his cigar at Cyrus—"and one of my best men, mark you, has had a spill up there. All the ore down the mountain side like a run of shale. Get up

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

on that seat, then, and let me see you take them two around this yard."

Cyrus looked at the size of the yard, and saw that he was asked to make a bend—nay, two bends—more acute than the bend on any road. He put foot to hub, swung into the seat, and the eyes of Punchy Jones, freighting boss, puckered. Archer lifted the reins with confidence, and Punchy observed the fingers on the lines giving that little tap as of a Morse code to the horses' mouths. There was a click ; they jerked into their collars and swung. They swung again. For a moment it looked as if they would object to the next bend, slackened in the collars ; but it was the hands on the reins that Jones kept his eyes on, interested. The S was completed with consummate ease, to superficial gaze, but even a novice on horses could know that it was no fluke ; then in his best manner, on the high seat, elbow on knee, lines loosely gathered, Cyrus Archer caused his prospective boss to miss a pull on his cigar, by explaining to him :

" Of course; though these two bends,"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

he looked over his shoulder casually at the size of the yard, "are a good deal sharper than any on the road up there," his eyes lifted to the mountain sides, "your yard is pretty well on the flat, isn't it?"

"You trying to belittle what you done?" asked Jones. "You can handle hosses all right."

"Oh no, not belittle," said Cyrus. "I was merely considering the difference between the test and the actuality. This is on the flat, instead of on the slope, but the curves are much more acute than anything on the road must be—even on the bits that I can't see," and he smiled.

"College man?" inquired Punchy.

"Incidentally," replied Cyrus.

It was a new word, but no matter—he could drive.

"Don't cut any ice to me," said the boss. "You may never have teamed before, maybe only drove a four-in-hand bevy of beauty out to one of them there champagne picnics I see about in the Sunday papers—but you can have the wages I pay my teamsters, sixty dollars a month. And

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

just you go right ahead now." He stepped on to the rear wheel, mounted into the wagon. "I got to get that ore gathered up and brought down to-day, according to my contract."

And once again, in answer to an all but invisible feeling of the lines, the horses with unanimity tautened their legs, flung into their collars. Cyrus's wrists curved and his fists tightly closed, for the horses were fresh and the wagon was empty, and they knew one was perched up behind them there who asked them to do their best. They were on their mettle, wanted to show off a little, but there must not be too much showing off with no ballast in the rig. Away they went, the great hoofs plunging and sucking in the mud of the flats, took the bend by the creek with tossing necks, and began on the long climb.

Punchy Jones balanced up to the front, and leant there, his head about on a level with the high-perched Archer's waist, looking up at the young man, taking stock of him, glancing at his hands, at his face again, and noting the glow on it—glow of an adventurer.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

For Cyrus was happy. He had always been keen on handling the reins though it was driving to no champagne picnic—as described with just sufficient touch of horror in the Sunday papers—that he had learnt the art. A kind of glamour came to him now, going up and up holding them in, knowing that there was work ahead, restraining but not tiring ; up and up with the old familiar smell of them, the good horse smell, and a dash of harness-smell, like faint flavouring in a pudding, and the rhythmic swish of their tails—up and up, with new draws opening out below them, windows of the scattered houses changing in perspective, and seeming to drift under the eaves—sound of the creek dying away until it was an undertone instead of a roar that made newcomers to Skookum Creek shout, the way men shout the first time they go into a sawmill.

The "off the map" charm of the place got into his blood. Down in Skookum City the hustlers referred to it in belittling accents, called it such names as "That one-horse tie camp"; or remarked: "They

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

only make enough pocket money up there to buy cartridges when they're going hunting." That was extreme in a way, perhaps, but it showed that they knew, down below, something of the easy life led up here. A little fishing ; a little hunting ; a little prospecting ; a little placering ; a little sticking in (of late) of apple trees ; a little off-hand cattle-raising ; a little poker ; a little euchre ; a little "jag" (for some of them) now and then ; a little sitting around, spinning and swopping yarns—they enjoyed all that.

It was a wondrously tranquil place, the quiet broken only (or made more manifest) by the profound, everlasting roar of the creek. And twice a day, across the valley there, the same scream, when the train rocked round on the spur-line—a haunting sound. If you had lived in Skookum Creek and learned to love it, and heard thousands of miles distant such a sound (perhaps on the New York Elevated, who knows?), you would feel a sudden thrill in your spine, something move in your breast, and hear again the creek called Skookum

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Creek, and see again the scattered roots of Skookum Creek ; and (in that moment of ecstatic memory, done in no broad splash, but in particularity of detail) behold, as in a vivid dream, the boulders by the creek-side, grey, blue ; and, under the rushing flow, the others, like a mighty alchemist jewellers' display, turned to opals in the water and the sun.

The hillsides, the cut bank on the inner side of the mountain wagon-road, showing glittering flakes of mica after rain, and the smell of the place would come back to you—the open odour that Cyrus Archer now breathed deep of, enjoying, since he had a job, all the big newness and wildness, instead of being a little appalled by it. For that was how it had begun to affect him after the building of the shack and the fence, and the sticking up of the sheets of glass had left him nothing to show in promise of a future banking-account but the first hint of tomatoes.

At last he felt that he had fitted in. He was happy that night. The stranded teamster on the mountain-side, half a dozen

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

muckers brought down from the mine, Punchy Jones and he cleared the scattered ore from the slopes ; and later, in the little Skookum Creek saloon where they gathered, his new boss proclaimed, even in his presence: " Best ore teaming I ever saw. I got some driver now."

It was a pity he did so, and yet in another way—for it is a topsy-turvy world—it was a good thing too. It was a pity for this reason: it made the teamster who had met with the accident fall a prey to jealousy on the top of his quite sufficient chagrin ; but, on the other hand, it made Punchy Jones all the more determined (for had he not blown the horn of his new master flagrantly in public ?) to make his way into the how and why of it. It was two days later, that bedraggled and camping Indian cargo into the town, he throatily said :

" Hullo ! what you want ? I skookum. Your—your—down hill—broken down. New—new—down hill." He made a gesture with his hands as if diving.

" What ? Down the hill ? " said Jones.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Same as other fellow," answered Lame Knee.

"All the ore?"

"And teamster." He tapped his own twisted leg. "All same me," he said.

"Broken leg."

"Where is he?"

"Down in shack. I bring him down. Lazy Lake catchum wife."

"He got a move on for once, then," said Jones, but it was as if he spoke subconsciously. He was more worried over his new teamster than congratulatory about Lake having moved.

"Mrs. Lake go over, you bet, and homely little girl. Doctor there, too."

The little girl was always referred to by Mrs. Lake as "this homely child," "this homely little girl," or in some such phrase, and perhaps, Lame Knee did not realize the aspersion suggested.

"Where you catchum woman?" asked Jones.

"Flag the train and ask," said Lame Knee.

"You did?"

"No. Homely little girl did."

## A CHAPTER OF TOPSY-TURVIES

"And there was a doctor on board," murmured Punchy Jones, merely as one making a passing comment. It was only one more instance to him of a fact he had often noted, one more story of the kind into which comes the sentence: "And I'll be jiggered if there wasn't a doctor coming down the road just when we wanted him!" Most men from outlandish places, all the world over, have such yarns. The college teamster was apparently in luck's way; perhaps he might not have to go about with an ungainly limp like this old wandering character of an Indian.

"All the same," muttered Punchy to himself, hauling on his coat to go up to the tomato shack, "all the same it's gol-darned vexatious after me shootin' off my chin that way about him the other night."

## CHAPTER II

### CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

IT all depends on the balance you strike, after summing up life and humans, what your verdict is to be on Mrs. Lake, Lazy Lake's spouse.—whether you sum up by calling her tough, or by calling her good-hearted. She was the daughter of a Nevada miner who, after an unfortunate dispute regarding a copper claim, considered it advisable to withdraw from these regions. His wife—the tough or good-hearted, or perhaps it should be tough *and* good-hearted Mrs. Lake's mother—departed with him; and in that country where the Rio Grande takes its big twist, pleasantly styled the Bloody Bend, he had settled, and there Mrs. Lake was raised.

Lake, anyhow, thought a deal of her, and she of Lake. He was an erratic person.

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

Member of a geological expedition down that river that has lured so many geologists, he had had a row with his chief which waxed so furious that he was told he could leave the expedition at the first settlement they came to that had any kind of stage connection with a railroad. The erratic Lake replied that he would leave the party instanter. It seemed craziness, and the chief thought that in five minutes he would think better of it, go on with the boats; but he did not. Camp struck, he selected his roll of blanket; and with that on his back, and his rifle on his shoulder, asked the boss to be good enough to pay him his salary to date. Seeing that the incident was thus serious, the chief dropped with genuine anxiety into the "Come now, Lake—you don't mean it!" attitude, but Lake's mind was fixed. He protested that he did. The chief then pointed out the dangers of going off alone and afoot like that; Lake, however, was untouched by this kindness following the altercation.

"Why, it's madness!" exclaimed the chief. "You come along. We can recon-

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

sider your leaving us at all. You come along."

And it has to be said of him that he was decidedly upset when the boats pushed off again, leaving Lake a solitary and, to him, somewhat demented figure, scrambling up the bank, hitting forth into the wilderness of cactus and thirst and dubious inhabitants. Lake's final reply to the opposition of "Why, it's madness!" had been: "All right, then I am mad. All I want is to sever my connection with you"; and there was in him just the amount of madness that you see in this incident.

Thereupon, indeed—with his climbing of that bank and tramping away into a country where the cattle were three-parts wild, so that if ever they saw a man on foot they went for him as something new to be annihilated—Lake severed not only connection with the expedition, but with all the old life that it linked him with. He circumvented the wild cattle; he evaded or made friends with the bad men, or maybe they welcomed the wanderer on foot, the queer thing in their midst, in a manner at the opposite pole from that of the

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

parched steers. Even bad men down in that section have been known to be hospitable. The lure of the sierras, and the lands to East and West on which they throw their indigo shadows, fell upon him. If he wandered out of the Bloody Bend country he wandered back again. He discarded what slight ambitions he had once had in the way of helping to place in glass cases in museums little bits of rocks, each with a card leaning against it, and the name, and the text-book description, neatly written thereon. His only link with the old life was in his name—for Leslie Lake's brother had been the well-known Horace H. Lake, of the Smithsonian Institute; and now you know enough of him to understand how he and Cyrus Archer could sit and pow-wow for hours on a fallen log.

Others might miss the disparities between Lake and his wife. As for Tomato Archer, they often lurked in the back of his mind during these conclaves that paid no heed to the rolling round of the world, that were untouched by the spirit which screams forth from the office motto-card: "Do it now!" He had realised that there must be a bit of

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

what is called crank in Lake. And Lake, indeed, welcomed him. He had periodic longings to talk about what some folks think are the things that matter, and others don't. When he disappeared sometimes from Skookum Creek, where he had now, after much wandering, made his home, and remained away from a fortnight to a month, he was not gone, in the sinister phrasing of a few, "to have a *good time* where nobody knows him," but could be found in the library of the State Capital, shaven and more or less groomed, reading about the wonders of the world, or conning the printed thoughts of men who tentatively try to arrive at some notion of what it is all about anyhow.

Mrs. Lake did not worry over these things, and he did not want her to worry. She was the kind of woman who could rip an oath with any frontiersman, set a splint with any doctor, affix a tourniquet, nurse you round without coddling, and say: "Oh, pshaw!" when you thanked her. To the plain little daughter of her husband's brother she extended the kind of affection

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

that seemed meet to her in what she termed a "derned hard world, and don't you forget it." The coming to them of that wondering-eyed little child would have been, from the point of view of the scholarly family to whom she belonged, had any of them been left to express opinion, sheer craziness. Her mother she had no memory of, for her memory did not go back, any more than yours, to a year after birth; and when her father died there was nothing for it, but for his housekeeper and his man, and his legal adviser, to hunt through his drawers for the address of that brother to whom he sometimes wrote, and from whom he occasionally received a letter, and again occasionally a bit of rock, or something that to the housekeeper looked like blend of rock and wood. These sendings were evidently interesting enough to go under the glass case of her employer's specimen table.

Lazy Lake out West wrote back at once to the lawyer that he would look after the orphan child, then no more than five years old; but as part of his crankiness—and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

parenthetically we may say that we think, as did Cyrus Archer at times, that it was a grave flaw in his make-up—as part of his crankiness was to keep his ethics and his life apart, to think that the things he talked of to such men as Cyrus, now and then, were excellent, but that the world was too material a place to harbour them, he seemed to look upon his duty as quite fulfilled by warmly welcoming the subdued little girl and then handing her over to his wife—in whose capacity to front the world he had great belief.

When Punchy Jones looked in at the open door of Archer's shack he found the orphan in charge. Lame Knee had done his part by carrying down the injured man; Lazy Lake had done his by routing out his wife, who, hearing a broken leg was the trouble, was immediately on deck, quite collected, even to the length of pulling out one of the sticks of the special tomato fence for splint and with ungainly movement snapping it against her upraised knee. It was really Mamie's imagination that brought out of nothingness the doctor.

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

"I wonder if there might be a doctor on the train," she said.

"Oh I can fix him up without a doctor!" replied her aunt, in her rough but unintentionally rough way.

However, as Lake's laziness was in this emergency a little counterbalanced by his liking for the injured man, he stuck hand in pocket, held head on side, and surveyed the tangled hills, turning over the suggestion.

"Might be no harm in trying," he opined.

Mamie had long since understood that this sort of reply was as good as ratification from him, and with as great celerity and capacity for making use of what came handy as her aunt had shown with the paling "stab," she pulled the tablecloth off the washing line, ran down the hill, leapt from boulder to boulder across the creek, and by the time that high scream sounded on the hillside around the bend (the flanges of the wheels crying out against the rail), she was half-way up to the track. Locomotive and she came to a stop quite neatly together; the locomotive let off a rush of steam, and she a tremendous sigh.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

High above in the cab the perspiring engineer took off his greasy cap and mopped his face dry in deference to a female, albeit such a homely little female. And the doctor, as you know, was aboard, which was perhaps as well, for it was a case of compound fracture; and with all due respect for Mrs. Lake's skill in the simple kind, the compound would have been complex to her, and there might have been a limp.

The medical man assured them that there would not be, however. At that news Lazy Lake bestirred him further, saddled both Lincoln and Garfield, and away went he and the doctor ambling after the train, as the stranger wanted to get on to Saghalie that night. This voluntary activity was particularly friendly and self-sacrificing of Lazy Lake, for there was no library at Saghalie; he had already visited the place just to see what the world was like beyond that range; and his own little trips out of the mountains, when he shook off his indolence, were always in the other direction. Indeed he bore the railway company a grudge that they had put the spur-line on

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

the far side of the creek; otherwise he might have gone out oftener.

With him away, Mrs. Lake had to leave the splinted invalid to Mamie, for she had to look after the little boarding-house that they ran to eke out a living. Some people said it was hard on her, but she did not seem to have any "kick" in respect to that, and her husband, a frying-pan expert, used to help her. She gave her directions to Mamie in a hoarse voice like a bald-headed eagle's. At a distance you might have thought it about time to run to the girl's protection had you not known that the raucous and vehement sound was only her aunt, aware that the world was a hard matter-of-fact place, giving final instructions and accentuating the doctor's orders.

So Mamie was alone. She thought, on seeing Punchy Jones, that perhaps she should stave him off; but he, hat in hand over heart, looked more anxious, as if on an errand of commiseration, than indignant, as if on a visit of censure.

"Can I see the pore feller?" he asked.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Step right in," said Mamie. "Watch your scalp-lock on that there low door."

So Jones entered, and found his sure-thing teamster with a face white through the sun-tan, gritting his teeth as he lay in his bunk.

"Well, this is bad," said Jones. "Anything I can do for you?"

Here was a pleasant beginning, to the sympathetic Mamie's relief.

"Perhaps," answered Archer, wincing, but emitting no groan, "you might prevail upon this young lady to withdraw beyond earshot."

"He wants to swear, miss," explained Punchy.

Mamie looked with big, wondering eyes at the injured teamster.

"Guess you can go right ahead," she said.

Jones shot her a troubled glance. It wasn't right; it surely wasn't right. Mrs. Lake was a good-hearted woman, and all that sort of thing, but it wasn't right to drag up this young girl. Not that he would butt-in in the matter; butting-in

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

was the last thing Jones would do. But that was how he felt.

"Anyhow," Mamie went on, "he don't want to swear. He wants to yell with the pain. But he won't yell before me." She gave a little laugh. "First time any man has been scared of me. What's the matter with me hearing him yell, if yelling's any relief? He can yell his gol-darned head off."

No, it wasn't right; it certainly wasn't right! Cyrus Archer forgot the pain that made him want to shout. He'd be hanged if he'd talk any more philosophy with Lazy Lake. When Lake should come around and try to begin another of these conversations he would not let him get beyond the first lap; he would say, plump and plain and to the point: "Look here, I'm not interested in your views and opinions, your mental attitudes and spiritual speculations. Until you think a little more about grafting your ethics on to life all this talk of yours makes all the more damnable your damnable way of letting that niece of yours just drift!"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

And Jones was horrified too. For himself, although he, as soon as he got off his guard with a lady, or really was drawn to her, everlastingily called things gol-darned, he always remembered he shouldn't the moment after—and made due apology. It was on record how he had once explained to the wife of the consulting engineer of the mines: "You are quite right, ma'am. It's a gol-darned beg-your-pardon road. There's a bend up there, just round that there spur, and I'll be gol-darned beg-your-pardon ma'am, if the first time, be God beg-you-pardon . . ." and so on, a long story of his troubles and victories on that mountain-side, to which she listened with intense gravity, and a little bow at the requisite places, her husband standing by with teeth clenched together looking like an effigy the eyes of which revolved in a fearsome manner.

"You yell right ahead," said Mamie. "I tell you what it is, if you don't start yelling right now—by gosh I'll start in yelling for you! I'm right sorry for you, Mr. Archer. It ain't only the broken leg,

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

it's a sure-thing driver like you getting a fall of that sort."

Jones frowned at this over a private thought which it brought again to the forefront of his mind, and he wondered if Archer's pain would allow of explanations. Cyrus, lying there, desired to make them.

"I don't want to offer excuses," he said, "but it was no careless driving."

"Oh?" growled Punchy, bending his head and heavily considering the other.

"Wheel off," explained Cyrus.

"Didn't you look to the hubs before you started?"

"It was my fault," the young man admitted. "I didn't this time—just took it for granted. It was that new number three wagon."

"It was? Yes, sure—so it was. I'm always doubtful of them pins, only them's the only kind of wagons I can get up here. I guess I'll just ride up and see how it's axed. I'll look in at you later."

He was gone, leaving the impression, on the minds of the two within, of a man with a thought unexpressed.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

And he had a thought unexpressed. It carried him uphill, made him a trifle Mexican to his saddle pony in his urging. She was dank and going like a bellows when he came in sight of the laughing squad of muckers from the mine, gathering up—with amusement at another spill that provided them with this kind of picnic, or cutting job—the scattered ore-bags. Jones dismounted beside the tilted wagon. The heavy, oat-fed draught horses had been taken out, clear of the pole, and with nose-bags on, big foreheads to the inner precipice, munched unconcerned as in their stalls. He pushed them round brusquely.

James, the teamster who was responsible for that former spill, driving down an hour after Archer, had come to a halt a few paces behind the overturned rig. He had been worried on seeing no sign of Cyrus, seeing only the scattered bags, the wagon, and the horses standing patiently waiting. It was not so bad a spill as his had been, he thought as he looked down the sloping hillside. The ore-bags had not been flung so far. There lay the wheel half-way down the incline.

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

stopped and propped in its flight against a precarious bush ; but there was no sign of the driver. Perhaps he had been thrown clear off the seat, rolled right to the bottom, and over into the creek ! James had not hoped for anything quite as bad as that. He placed rocks against the fronts of his own four wheels, super-careful in case of mishap, and began a scrutiny of the slope ; and it was, to be just to him, with relief that he read the story told by that roof-like place. A horse had evidently been ridden round the lop-sided wagon, and just ahead of it, dismounting, a rider had pressed a slightly in-toed moccasin print, then gone down-hill, digging in his heels well. James followed in these small steps and stairs, eyes keenly examining. He gathered that the new hand had not rolled very far. It was all plain to a man without more than ordinary capacity for what is called wood-craft.

These markings did Punchy Jones also survey, with hardly a salutation at all to the men who were at work. His eyes were on the ground, his brows frowning. The

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

men retrieving the ore made a great tramping immediately below the wagon, but they did not disturb the other signs. Archer had been flung out with a jerk, a foot or two in advance. Jones performed his examination very thoroughly—with the rapt and gloomy expression habitual to that kind of gardener who is never quite satisfied when surveying his flower-plots. He took a long time about it, and though he never looked directly up, he was aware that teamster James glanced at him now and then. Slowly he came back again, climbing the slope on his toes, pulled out a cigar, bit the end off, and moving up to his teamster spat out the bitten tip, carefully took from his tongue, and flicked away a remaining shred, and then suddenly, looking James right in the eyes, he inquired: "And did you find the pin?"

"And did you find the pin?" he repeated after a pause, in a louder voice, as if asking: "Don't you understand me?" He blew through his cigar, looked at it, held between thumb and forefinger, then tilted his chin at James. "Scarf-pin? Hat-pin? What

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

the hell pin do you think I mean? Rolling-pin, or what?" he said.

The teamster responded in kind, and asked him what, by the same token, he was getting at. Jones pointed to the off-side, which was the outer-side of the wagon.

"It's the off-wheel went," he said. "Well that's nacheral enough. This side of the road could do with a bit of banking up to make the swing the other way on the curve. That's nacheral enough. But I tell you what ain't nacheral, and that is that there ain't no sign of the pin, top or bottom of the pin. What pin? Hub-pin! Where the hell is the hub-pin? I want to look at it. I want to look at it in the worst way."

"I ain't got the pin. What would I want looking around for the pin?"

This seemed grimly to amuse Jones. He laughed, and putting cigar in left corner of his mouth rolled it to the right with his tongue.

"Well, sir," he said slowly, "you can start right ahead and find that pin while there's daylight. And if you don't find that pin you can pull your freight. And

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

what's more—you can pull your freight out of this State."

That was, perhaps, the final word—the word too much.

"I don't have any man talk to me like this," said the teamster. "I can pull out anyhow. You can get some other man to bring down that wagon there," and he jerked his head toward the load in the rear. Lifting his coat from the road, where he had flung it to help in salving the ore, he made to move round Jones.

"Half a minute!" cried the boss, and grabbed his elbow.

James evidently looked upon this as the introduction of physical force, and hit out. Punchy ducked, flicked him with a foot on the calves, and thrust him backwards. The story went that in younger days Jones had bummed around the country on the freight-trains, was a runaway 'Frisco kid. Possibly! Anyhow, what happened next was not pretty—none of these sort of things are pretty. He bent quickly in the attitude of runners toeing the line to start a race, and the lower knee went swiftly and many

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

times into the teamster's wind. James lay and gasped, gasped long enough for Jones, one hand on his throat, knee in his stomach, to slip the free hand into the man's pockets—waistcoat and pants; but what he sought he did not find, and he suddenly felt, as they say, up against it. A new facet of the case flashed itself on his mind, for even in these out of the way places the police-side can enter. If this teamster wanted a big score, and could collect himself on rising sufficiently to choose that course instead of the more natural one of a man-to-man scrap, here was an excellent case, with witnesses too, of an unprovoked assault. Then suddenly, as a last hope, Punchy grabbed at the coat that James had lifted—grabbed at it, standing now, and stepped back a pace or two, while the teamster, still grievously gasping, sat up. And from a pocket the boss drew forth the top of the hub-pin, looked at it, looked at James sitting there in the mire, looked at the muckers who had all desisted in their task and grouped nearer. They, on their side, merely stared at the pin. He held it out.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

" Filed!" he said briefly.

They stooped to it, stared closer. The thing was obvious. Raising their heads they glanced at the teamster, who rose, clearing his throat and coughing. He was a hefty enough specimen; given other conditions of encounter he might have seriously mauled Jones. He stood up; hang-dog he raised his eyes, not to the face of the boss but as far as the pin, and as he did so Jones' arm went up abrupt, like a semaphore arm, and he flung the coat back to its owner, who caught it and, wheeling, departed on the instant down the road.

Hand on hip, Punchy watched him, his fingers—in a way he had—tucked in the backband of his waistcoat. Then he bent and picked up his cigar, dusted it as if to smoke it, tossed it away. With a little puff of satisfaction he turned round to the muckers.

" That there college-guy," he said, " who's teaming for me, is a sure-thing driver."

There was a look of pleasure on his face. It had worried his simple mind that he had announced the fact so short a while before

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

this upset, for the upset might seem occasion for a josh down in Skookum Creek. Well, he wouldn't talk about the thing ; that teamster could pull out—pull right out of the State if he was wise ; but he would put the pin in his pocket. He wouldn't start the subject in case people thought he was wanting to defend his view ; but if any man down in town (for thus grandiloquently did they speak of those scattered houses in the valley pocket) should say to him : " I see that handler of the ribbons of yours has had a spill," why then he would do the thing in the quiet way he liked—take the pin from his pocket, offer it for the speaker's scrutiny as one offers a cigar, and in his low growl of a voice he would say : " That's right. Have a look at that gol-darned pin, will you ? "

But nobody did thus approach him. And there was nothing for it, late though it was that night when he got the two wagons down and the ore dumped at the Concentrator—there was nothing for it but that he should go up and show the pin to the one whom it chiefly concerned. After all, a man may call to see a sick person even

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

at a late hour. He reached the door and coughed, and Mamie, looking a little tired, opened to him, lamp in hand.

"Why, gol-darn it," thought he as he saw her in the soft yellow light, "she ain't so homely after all."

"He's asleep," she said. "The doctor said he was to have a sleeping-draught if he got fevered. He talked a bit too, before he went off properly ; he seems to hate having had that spill."

Jones, hat in right hand over his chest, put left hand in pocket and producing the pin held it out under the lamp.

"Gol-darn it," he said, "have a look at that—I beg your pardon, miss."

She was too greatly interested in the story of the pin to observe either the apology or the cause for it. She listened to Punchy's story of how he had found it with big eyes and nodding head, and an occasional : "Well, say ! Wouldn't that jar you ! "

Then Punchy departed, and a little later, according to agreement, her lazy uncle, just back from Saghalie, came over to relieve her, he to sleep at the shack that night. In

## CINDERELLA'S LANGUAGE

the morning she carried across the breakfast tray. Lazy Lake helped to prop the patient up.

"How has he been?" she asked.

"All right, considering," replied Lake. "Woke me up early, talking in his sleep."

Archer smiled, the smile of a man in pain.

"Yes," said Lake, "you don't seem able to get over that spill. Why, it's nothing to worry about. There's been several spills on that road, worse than yours, since I came here."

"Pshaw, still worrying about that!" exclaimed Mamie. She put her hand mysteriously in the pocket of her apron, and parroting the words of one of these kindly males who thought it terrible that the poor little thing should be dragged up to such a tough vocabulary, she said (it sounded painfully quaint on her lips to the young man in the bunk): "There ain't no call for you to worry about that! Have a look at this, gol-darn it. I asked Punchy Jones to leave it with me—just in case you started again putting in more assessment work on that vein!"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

And with ever so sweet and kindly an interest in Archer's trouble, but with deplorable adjectives, she offered balm for his hurt pride, and all unconsciously worried him too for her own poor little sake. Indeed, she wondered, once or twice, with a pang of disappointment, why he did not look exactly whole-heartedly cheerful over the story she narrated for his ease.

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## CHAPTER III

### LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

YET, after all, he did not deliver his lecture to Lazy Lake. To a man of a certain sensitiveness there were preventives; and unless the maladroit upbringing of Mamie were to weigh too-too heavily on his mind (which he must not allow it to do) he would renounce even the opportunities to deliver that lecture. Here he was on his back, and it was not only Mamie and Mrs. Lake whom he had to thank for kindness; he was grateful to Lake too. Had not Lazy Lake saddled Lincoln and Garfield to take the doctor—that Mamie had culled out of the passing train across the valley—on to his destination at Saghalie? Had he not also telephoned to the other doctor, who was spoken of as "local," he who resided at Skeokum City, ninety miles down

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

creek? Had he not further bestirred himself with pen and paper, and at the expense of some dollars, to order—with amazing discrimination—books for the recumbent man to read?

All this kept Archer from even hinting at a lecture when he might have done so, though the better he came to know the girl the more criminal did it seem that she should have been so much neglected. When the first batch of books was presented diffidently by Lake, Archer said: "Beats me how you hit my taste so well."

"We've had many a talk," replied Mamie's uncle, explanatory.

"True," agreed Cyrus, looking at the books, but thinking what a strange manner of man this was who thus kindly ministered to him—fumbling, mentally, as well, a little with the opportunity now offered to suggest to him that he might think about the education of the girl.

"These are the first books I've brought in here," said Lake. "I never mix things up."

"That's just my trouble with you."

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

said Archer inwardly. "I wish you would mix things up a bit more!" But he let that chance go too.

"No, I never mix things up," went on Lake, sitting down on a stool. "If I want books I go out for a month and read. The boys say I go off on the drunk!"

For the moment no further opportunities were offered, for Jones appeared, and hearing the last words, asked: "Who's talking about drunk?"

Lake did not explain. Evidently not to mix things up was one of the tenets of his religion. He drew a red herring across the trail.

"You ever been drunk?" he said.

Punchy grinned. "Well, I don't know what you would call drunk," he replied, "but I was dern puzzled once."

The other two men smiled and, thus encouraged, Jones added: "Yes. I got off my left shoe after goin' home, got it off without thinking what I was doing, just acting nacherally and accordin' to custom. But I mostly takes off my right shoe first; and after taking off my right shoe that

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

night, with my mind on the job then instead of just without thinkin', I start in as I thought on the left shoe—but you see it was off already! And I wrastled with my foot, trying all ways to lever it off by the heel. It was some time before I perceives. I don't know if that's what you would call drunk, but it was certainly absent-minded." He looked at his wounded teamster. " Anything I can bring you?" he suggested. " Tobacco? The last Sunday paper?"

He glanced round the shack, so greatly tidied up by that homely little girl, and made tribute to its neatness by commenting: "If I bring you a plug of chawing tobacco, I guess I got to buy you a spittoon."

He was on his way up to the mine, had just dropped in, making an invalid call, and when he departed Lake of his own accord cast back to the earlier conversation.

"No," he said, "I never mix things up. What has my talk got to interest Mrs. Lake, for instance? Mark you, I would die for Mrs. Lake. She's a white woman, all right. Yes, sir, I would die for Mrs. Lake. I made deliberate choice. I looked

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

on this picture, and on this, after I piked out from the Hiram Atterberry Geological Survey. She's genuine. She's a sight more genuine with her talk about what canned goods we need to lay in, than many a woman back there," he wagged his head Eastward, "in her talk about what's called the Eternal Verities. They may talk about the Eternal Verities, but what they're interested in is Delmonico's—fresh plums out of season, instead of canned; that's all. Mrs. Lake for me—raised in the Bloody Bend. I've got less of a squirm here in a cuss-word from her than I would have looking in to show I was on deck, or existed, at a Maeterlinck Afternoon in the other groove of life. I tell you what it is—there's no bunkum about Mrs. Lake, and if I brought books and thoughts into her life, in the real sense of thoughts, she might side-track like ninety-nine out of a hundred, and the last state would be worse than the first. My point is that the first state isn't bad at all. I say all this to you, Archer, because I know you've wondered, although you're far too courteous to do what the West calls butting-in."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Cyrus, in the midst of his interest in this *confession intime* had a side thought to the effect : " There ! I've missed the chance to talk about that poor little Mamie, and this makes it incumbent upon me not to say a word about her now."

" We're happy," declared Lake, beginning afresh, with a note in his voice this time as if making defence for himself, " we're healthy. Mrs. Lake likes the life—it's *her* life, and when I can't hold it down I pop out. She makes no kick ; she's as hard as nails, but she's a live-and-let-live woman. I have my periodic browse of books, and if it leaked out at any time she would be valorous on my behalf, and say : ' Better settin' in a library than settin' in a saloon.' "

He paused, and in the pause, while all Archer's interest in this display of the inner man, there was for him a minor thought, occasioned by these last words : " He's been married to her all these years, and she still says *settin'* instead of *sitting* ! " But he realised that this was really unimportant ; it was only by the way ; and it is highly probable that if he had not been

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

so much concerned about Mamie he might have missed it altogether. He took it up, however—hardly aware that he showed to Lake what was the link in his mind.

"Yes," he said, "goodness—what is called being white by the white races—"

Lake smiled.

"A little arrogantly to the red," he interposed.

They nodded each to each in understanding.

"—all that sort of thing is not a matter of grammar, of course," continued Archer, as if thrashing it out to himself, "just as success in life is not a matter of living in a castle on the best part of the Hudson and calling it a cottage. The other point, however, is why keep all one's deeper thoughts to oneself, and hidden away—just because they are not exactly dynamic to us?"

"Oh, but they are dynamic!" broke in Lake, showing that he got into the drift already of his host's soliloquy.

"Perhaps—in a way," agreed Cyrus. "Then let me put it like this—just as an

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

argument—I don't use the word in the sense of dispute——”

“ No, no—I understand. In the Platonic sense.”

Archer raised his head and looked at Lake doubtfully, for in the very act of assurance Lake had given him a qualm. To himself he said, for about the hundredth time, “ No—it's not right. He's not being fair to that dear little Mamie. He's all right to Mrs. Lake, but that's a different matter.”

“ My argument, then,” he said aloud, “ is this—why should you not, for example, to take a case in point, bring the books in and leave them lying about—give an all-round chance to everybody.”

There! He was perilously near it, perhaps without knowing how much the interior, awakening, chivalric sense for the homely little girl moved him. Lake had been listening to all this very seriously, sitting forward upon his stool, hands locked, elbows on knees, chewing at a cigar left by Punchy Jones—chewing it instead of smoking it. Now he gave a little smile, and

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

lifting a hand pointed to the bunk in which lay the young man who was only talking platonically, not personally. Cyrus looked in the direction indicated and, keen upon his argument (or should we say keen upon Mamie? — not necessarily proprietorially keen at all, but in the way of a troubled onlooker; Punchy Jones was troubled too), he did not understand. Lake added speech to gesture to make plain.

"I notice all the same," said he, "that when the breezy Punchy Jones came in you drew your blankets over the books. How does that fit in? What did you do it for? Sensitive about what means a lot to you? Sensitive for your sake? Sensitive for the dead authors, in case he might pick one up and josh a sentence? I know it wasn't dog-in-the-manger from you."

"Well, you see," began Archer, "Punchy Jones is a fine fellow, but—well, hang it, you see the way he came in, anyhow. Be in Rome as the Romans are. That's not exactly what I was thinking of. It's a different case."

He turned his head, lying there in his

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

bunk, and looked at Lake as if for aid—to find that his visitor was watching him with an expression that might be calculating, or bantering—he could not tell which. But it was for all the world as though Lazy Lake said to him—actually said to him: "You would like to tell me that I don't do the fair thing by Mamie."

And with that the homely little girl entered, carrying a laden tray.

"Say," she said, "I see Lame Knee coming down the hill, heading this way, right across the draw. I'll just hike over and rustle some grub for him too. If you happened to make friends with a Chink, I'd hate like hell to be on the wrong side of a tray with him, but Indians are different, even if they ain't clean. Lame Knee's clean all right. They're surely different. I think it's up to a white man to rustle the grub for an Indian when you consider how we have hustled him around the country that was once his own country."

With which statement of opinion, and a nod and a smile to the invalid, she whirled on her heel, pig-tail flying; and long after

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

she was gone Archer saw her like that—wheeling in the doorway, even to a rent in her frock at the side. Then, suddenly recalling that, as he had thought, bantering or considering, or both, scrutiny of Lake's, he meditated: "Better talk, or he'll suspect that I'm pondering the case of his duty to her after this last glimpse"; and he turned to her uncle, prepared to meet with nonchalance another such scrutiny, with the twinkle increased; but instead he found Lake sitting staring heavily at the floor, like a man working out a problem—his own problem, not another's. Then Lake raised his head, and it was he who seemed a little disturbed upon finding himself under observation.

"Well," he said, "you don't want finer sentiment than that. There's the milk of human kindness there, and the instinct for a—" he paused on what he was about to say.

"Square deal," suggested Cyrus.

"Yes—well, square deal. That's what I was going to say," and lifting a leg he struck a sulphur match on the inner side,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

lit his badly gnawed cigar, then looked over his shoulder. "Here's your Indian friend," he said.

At the door stood Lame Knee. "How do?" he murmured gutturally.

"Klahowya!" answered Lake.

But Archer gave it him in his own tongue—"Kusookiook"; for Lame Knee was a Kootenai, a North Kootenai at that, who had drifted down here and remained. The Kootenai salutation which he had told Archer was now offered to him in somewhat of the cheerful way that one may, upon occasion, salute a Scotsman (even if aware he does not talk so) with "Hoo are ye the day?"

Lame Knee smiled.

"I make good Indian of you," he said. "Some day I see about taking you into tribe." He touched his forehead. "Cannot think of name—when I know you better, maybe I can think of name. Oh, by'm-bye."

"You got a heap of ceremony taking an honorary tribesman, haven't you?" asked Lake.

"Oh yes. There must be ceremony when

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

a man is taken into the tribe and given an Indian name." He froze up, the voluble white man greeting over, subsiding to the floor, crossed his legs, fell silent.

"Where did you go to school—I mean white man school?" Lake wanted to know. "Carlisle?"

Lame Knee shook his head.

"State Indian school?"

Lame Knee held up his forefinger. "One day," he replied. "I see a boy birched—no good. Don't go back."

"But you know a lot about what white men think," persisted Lake. "Where do you learn that?"

The Indian smiled.

"From you," he said. "From Archer. Lot of white men. I am old;" which doubtless meant that he had talked with many men like Lake or like Archer.

At that moment Mamie came back with a second tray.

"Hullo, Busted Leg!" she cried, aiming at friendliness.

Lame Knee made brief but dignified inclination of his head and smiled.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"You savvey Busted Leg?" Lake inquired.

"Savvey American," answered Lame Knee, and puzzled Lake. It was impossible really to tell how much an Indian of this type knew, or did not know, of the white man's world.

"Come along, uncle," said Mamie, "and leave them two to pow-wow. Or is it potlatch?" she asked the Indian.

Soberly he considered this, shook his head. "No, with potlatch you give present. I bring you present, I bring you something."

"Don't you trouble about that," replied Mamie; "you give this cripple his chuck." She indicated Archer with a waggle of her hand, and pointed to the tray.

"You bet you," said Lame Knee, rising.

"Gee-whiz!" she exclaimed, as he came nearer, "you got a smell of wood-smoke about you."

"New moccasins," he said, lifting a foot.  
"Bring you pair next time."

Her smile was wholly friendly and charming. "That's all right," she declared, "don't you worry about me."

## LAKE STATES HIS CREDO

Lake stood up, a slight frown between his brows, a frown of worry, that was not missed by Archer, looking on.

"See you later then," said he. "Come along, Mamie."

And Cyrus wondered if it was only in his imagination that there seemed a new note in Lazy Lake's voice as he spoke. Not that Lake had not a distinct fondness for his niece; it wasn't that, but his gaze and voice together were to Cyrus suggestive of a deeper thought in him—a thought that perhaps he had not given the girl a square deal so far.

But while he ate Archer told himself that he must quit this, he must really quit this. He was getting it on the brain.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUTTINGLY AIN'T—CERTAINLY NOT

WE must get a move on with the story, in case you become more tired of Archer's compound fracture than he was himself. I say *more* tired instead of *as* tired, because there were so many compensations to him that, despite the early pain and the later healing itchiness, there were times when he could have written a fairly convincing essay on the pleasures of breaking one's leg. It was not that he had in his nature that which might make two citizens of Skookum Creek bear the prefix of "lazy"; it was not that; but being unable to work he sanely dismissed his worry at being idle. "I loaf and invite my soul," said Whitman; it was something like that with Cyrus.

To Mrs. Lake he never thought of making any such confession, merely assured her he

## SUTTINGLY AIN'T-CERTAINLY NOT

was "all right"; thanked her for her student kindness, and received her: "Pshaw! " "Tain't nothin'!" To Mamie, however, he amplified his assurances that he was "all right."

"I can't move around yet," he said (he was out of the bunk that day, with his leg on the stool), "but I can sit here and look up at the old mountains with snow in the cracks, and look down at the creek with the sun in it."

She stared up at the warm brown hillside opposite, so warm and kindly under the cold amethyst and silver of the peaks.

"It suttinly looks good to me," she said. "I've never had no one to speak to me the way you do, Mr. Archer."

"Doesn't your uncle talk to you?" he asked, wondering why Mrs. Lake called her the homely little girl.

"Uncle Leslie!" she cried. "Why should he talk to me? I ain't clever like you."

He took pipe from pocket, opened his little bag of tobacco, and filled the bowl, but did not light up.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

" You would like to live here always ? " he questioned.

" I would like to move around and take it all in," she answered wistfully, " but I guess if I got anywhere where the womenfolk use scent, same as a woman did that sat beside me on the cars when I went down to Skookum City two years back—say she did surely smell like a skunk—well, I guess I'd want to get home and sniff the balsam again."

You could smell it that day. A wind ran down the valley, a river of balsam scent.

" It certainly smells good to me," said Archer slowly.

He had already decided that pronunciation was a detail and perhaps Lake was not only a sophist in his views ; perhaps the feud between *settin'* and *sitting*, between *certainly* and *settlingly*, was not worth while in the brief span of man's life in the sun. Still, he might drop the correct word, and she might hear—though, apart from that, Mamie, the very creature on whose behalf he had a bone to pick with Lake, was, it would appear, almost winning him round to her uncle's view. Droll world ! Who was he to drop a

## SUTTINGLY AIN'T-CERTAINLY NOT

"certainly" for the ears of this child to hear, and maybe pick up? But was she a child? He suspected that she was growing up without either her uncle or her aunt being aware of the fact.

"How old are you?" he broke out.  
"If I may ask."

"Sure," she said. "Eighteen."  
His eyebrows elevated a little.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"I have known twenty-seven snows," said he, using the phrase that Lame Knee always used instead of "years."

"And suns too, I guess," she remarked.  
"Have you got a girl back East?"

"Yes."

She nodded out of the window. "Do you know what I would like to see for you?"

"No. What?"

"You gettin' out in the sun again, gettin' your tan back." She paused. "You certainly look kind of pale," she added, with first a drooping, then a lifting of her eyes.

She had picked up the "certainly." You may think that she could have picked up that sort of thing—and more—from Lake,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

but at home he spoke his wife's patois, although well did Mrs. Lake know that when he cared (she had had, indeed, occasions for observing this in earlier years) he could shoot off his bazoo, as she said, like a professor. And then, as you know, he had his point of view. In so far as externals, on that great day to which he referred as if it were a kind of new birth, that day when he piked off into the sun and cactus of the Bloody Bend, he had made some kind of Ruth to Naomi decision, something in the vein of : "Where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people"; and if he could not add : "Thy God my God," he certainly could add : "And thy picturesque carelessness of speech my picturesque carelessness." He had fought shy of anything like settlements. If another house were built in Skookum Creek, belike he would flee with his Ishmaelitish woman and his ward, who so far, like a stray chick, had evaded the grasp of the educational departments.

But, after all, Archer asked himself often, getting to know her, might not one illiterate—in the sense of unacquainted with books—

## SUTTINGLY AIN'T-CERTAINLY NOT

know much more naturally, by personal observation and feeling, than could ever be pumped by any scholastic system into the head and heart of one cradled in a library? You note that the subject was still occupying his thoughts. His answer to that was: "All the more reason to give one with such fine instincts a chance."

It was when he came that length, found himself meditating upon her fine instincts, that he bethought him of his Sense of Honour, and of the girl back East to whom he understood he was engaged to be married, who expected him—after this whim of a "wander-year" was over—to render some account of himself. He had said nothing in his letters to her about Mamie, but now he did—now, you perceive, when he was getting better. I believe I am right in saying that on the very day he made three tentative steps across the floor—on the strength of the fact that the "local" doctor had told him that he had better not try for two or three days yet—on that very day, writing to Dulcie Armstrong, he mentioned Mamie. It was a jocular letter, in which he spoke of "Sister

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Lake" and "Nurse Mamie." It struck him that he had already referred to Mrs. Lake once or twice, and with some sort of notion of squaring the bill for not having told her of Mamie he wrote :

" You should see her—my homely little thing, with her pig-tail and home-made frocks. Her vocabulary is an education in itself."

" Dulcie will wonder why you have not mentioned her before," said something inside his skull, which was a sort of oblique way of asking himself : " Why didn't you tell about her before ? " Well, he had done so now—he had confessed to her existence ; but after he had handed Punchy Jones the letter to post for him—this letter that was to square his conscience with Dulcie Armstrong—he would fain have had it back to add a line : " But don't you imagine, nevertheless, that I don't admire her. It is the thoughts that matter, much more than the way they are expressed." For, having squared his conscience in respect to Dulcie, he had smirched it in respect to that homely little girl.

## SUTTINGLY AINT-CERTAINLY NOT

"What I want," he told himself, aggravated at this bubbling of argument and casuistry in his brain, "is to get on my pins, get on a horse, and have a ride in the open air."

He had his desire. Once on the mend he mended rapidly, to the astonishment of Mamie, who, looking in at the tomato shack one day—not to bring him a meal now, for he had first gone across to the boarding-house with a stick, and during the last days without a stick—just to see if the place was tidy, found him in the midst of a scene that made her exclaim :

"Now, wouldn't that jar you?"

There was an ink-pot on the table, also there were papers and pen, and the ink was still wet. But that wasn't what jarred her. In the middle of the floor was Lame Knee, tapping his hands together with: "Now, one—two—three!" pause; "one—two—three!" pause; and explaining to her uncle: "When I do hat you say 'Ha!' And then you, rcher, come in 'He!' You savvy ees?"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Sure!" said Lake, "Where did you learn about glees, may I ask, Lame Knee?"

"The missionary told me once."

"He must have been a dam good missionary," remarked Lake. "Come on, then."

Mamie stood in the door, a-gaze, as Lame Knee went round the shack, beating time with his palms, and the "Has!" and the "hes!" arose, creating rhythm. She glanced at the Indian's feet, and saw that the step was not, after all, so tremendously easy. But that did not restrain Lazy Lake and Archer (the former despite his laziness, the latter despite his recent compound fracture); the surge of the rhythm, with the roar of the creek echoing in the place, assailed them, and away they went in a circle after the red man, till at last with joyful laughter Lame Knee stopped. A few months ago and Mamie would have joined in, for the surge of it got into her too, but to-day she was shy. As she watched Cyrus moving round that way she realised that the days of attending on him were irrevocably over. When he stepped to the

## SUTTINGLY AIN'T-CERTAINLY NOT

table, and dipping his pen in the ink made a note or two, she could keep quiet no longer.

"Why, whatever are you doing?" she asked.

"That's all right, Mamie," said her uncle. How queer it was! Her pleasure next moment seemed out of all proportion with the simplicity of Archer's reply. It was as if he were making a real friend of her when he said: "Hush! Tell it not in Gath. I'm writing a book upon our Aborigines. I have a lot to learn too."

"You got a lot to teach, too, Mr. Archer," she said. "What's the meaning of 'Tell it not in Gath'? I can catch hold of the sense of it, but why Gath? Why not Shookum Creek?"

"Just for the same reason," broke in her uncle, "that professors go around giving plants Latin names instead of good American ones."

"Oh no!" cried she. "Cy Archer is certainly not like that."

Lake looked at the girl with astonishment. This she said quite naturally, gazing directly

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

at him, but now she was a little flustered, and plucked her pig-tail that hung over her shoulder. He glanced at Archer, back at his niece ; he had noticed " is certainly not " instead of " suttling ain't." It was a minor detail ; still, perhaps the young man was right in what he had hinted on that day of their queer talk ; perhaps these details were like the first steps. It came to him again—a thought that had come to him more than once of late—that he had failed in his duty, and that this wanderer (who could discourse on Socrates and handle horses) had done more for the girl in a few brief weeks than he had done since that day when he took her over from the Coon bed-maker who had looked after her on the journey West, and tendered him a five-dollar tip to show his gratitude.

" I'll have to write to your fiancée," she said, chirping up again, " and tell her you're turning into a fair savage."

Lake had not heard of Dulcie Armstrong before. Though he showed it in unusual ways, this Lazy Lake—who had told Atterberry twenty years ago " I am mad "—was

## SUTTINGLY AIN'T-CERTAINLY NOT

feud of the homely little girl. I think he would have died as willingly for her as for his wife, had need been.

"I hope it's not going to be a Swift and Stella business," he thought. "It may be hard on Stella. And, after all, she's not just a chicken. Time she was having her hair up—time she was having her hair up."

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

"You look interested. What are you reading?" came a voice, and Cyrus glanced up.

He was, as they say in the vernacular, "feeling good." Back at work, he was once more happy with the happiness that comes from a knowledge of sliding muscles and supple wrists. *Mens sana in corpore sano* is no great proverb, but it can pass. Hardly a proverb indeed but has a hole in it somewhere. Many a healthy body carries about a mind as little interesting as the pick and shovel that have developed the thew. To feel fit as a bucking bronco and at the same time have dreams in one's head is grand, and that was how Cyrus Archer felt now, considering that there are worse ways of life than nursing a couple of

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

brawny draft-horses all day, and loafing with pipe and book in the evening.

At the hail from below he raised his head. While he was reading, elbows on knees, book in hand, squatted upon his stool in the doorway, a darting chipmunk or two had rustled the underbrush ever and again; and what little sound the arrival of Mamie now caused had not been sufficient to draw him from the pages. He rose, and making his bow, replied :

"A novel. I'm lost in it as if was at a fair. It beats me," he went on as she accepted the offer of his waved hand and seated herself. "It beats me! Somebody sent me a couple of tomes the other day from one of our students of psychology. I never read such bunkum. I began to suspect, before I had waded far, that they were just words, or rather absurd travesty of grand manner."

"They were difficult to read?"

"Not because of their sense—because of their nonsense. What is the use of going on reading the theories of a man when one simply definitely disagrees with every

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

finding he arrives at, and makes a spring-board for his next plunge? It's as if one saw in an arithmetic book that two and two are five—and so let us get on to the next sum. On top of the psychology book comes this book; and it makes me think that the real psychologist is the artist. The schoolmaster takes it for granted that the right way to go about his work is to test the artist's value by another schoolmaster's statement. Really the exponent of psychology should read the novelists for hints—instead of reading them for the pleasure of deciding where they err! I often used to think that way at college. Well," he broke off, "how have you been to-day? What have you been doing? Had a ride?"

"Oh please don't switch off like that!" cried Mamie. "What I like about you and uncle when you meet is that you don't start in talking about the things that don't cut any ice. It's not, 'What have you been doing?' but 'What have you been thinking?' I was so happy just now when you started off like that—and now you're going to spoil it!"

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

"I think I have said all that I had to say at the time," he replied, laughing, and leant against his door-post looking down on her.

"I learn such a lot from you," she said, as in continuance of the theme; then, perhaps because of a new look on his face, she added, or amended: "from you and uncle when you are talking as if I wasn't around."

"You know it all already, don't you?" he asked.

She had never met a man like Cyrus before, although a side of Lake was like him. This would have been banter even from her uncle, but from Cyrus it did not strike her ears as spoken with a note of banter. She looked very seriously at him, and came to the conclusion that there was not even a frill of banter to it.

"Well," she said, "I just listen to you. I'm learning all the time; but I have my own opinions on your two opinions." Quickly she added: "That's not just what I mean. I know I'm not clever at all, but I like to listen and follow; and even

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

when I don't agree, I think maybe I might if I understood better."

" You give me a creep ! " said Cyrus. " Who am I ? What do I know ? Nothing ! "

" Maybe that," and roguishly she twinkled at him, " is why I learn from you. If you knew all, like the schoolmaster, maybe I would learn nothing ! "

Something fluttered down from the book he held and he stooped for it, but it was wafted to her lap and she picked it up to hand to him. Then—

" What is it ? Can I look at it ? " she asked.

" Surely," he replied. " I don't know that it is anything great, but it has a jog in it in a way. I cut it out of a paper."

Holding the cutting in her graceful hand (it was the hand, not the cutting, on which his eyes rested), she said :

" That's what I mean by listening to you and uncle talking. There's always a *jog* in what you say. It keeps me thinking all the next day—Oh I can't tell you ! I feel there's something *to* life now that there

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

wasn't before—in life, I should say? In life, shouldn't I?"

He nodded lightly, as if that was side-issue, and said he: "That's just cumulative evidence for what I said. You know it all already. As our American philosopher remarked—something to the effect that the mind understands what it brings with it the power of understanding."

"Oh, all right, Mr. Archer. You leave it like that, then. If the seed is away down in my head, then you and uncle please go on being the irrigating system for me!"

He wanted to say: "Bless you, I'd do anything for you"; but he remained mute, and she turned to the cutting in her hand.

"'A gentleman,' she read, 'does not give his daughter a dowry of from twenty-five thousand dollars to two hundred and fifty dollars and forget to provide her with a library. A gentleman does not have a full wine-cellar and empty book-shelves.' Oh," she interjected, "I once heard uncle say to you that we could have a town offering fifty opportunities to buy a cock-tail against one to buy a book. This is the same idea."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

She read on: "'A gentleman does not borrow good works which he is in a position to buy.'"

At that her countenance suffered such a change that Cyrus had to ask: "What's wrong?"

It was an expressive and sensitive face that looked up at him, a troubled little face.

"Oh," she sighed, "I agree with that—and—oh dear, I was going to ask you to lend me a book you were speaking about the other day. Now I can't."

"Yes you can!" he exploded; and then hoped that the stress and accent on the "you" had not sounded to her ears as they sounded to his own. He thought they possibly had not, for he was an average man—and the average man has no skill in reading impressions made by him to compare with the average woman's skill in perceiving the reception of her speeches. That, of course, may be only because the average man is more occupied with his theory than his audience, whereas the woman—but a hint. This is the story of Cyrus and

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

Mamie, and not a treatise on sex and psychology.

"It would be a queer condition of affairs," he went on, "if in a little place like this we couldn't pass a book round even more freely than a bottle, considering our agreement with that comment of your uncle's on the fifty opportunities for cock-tail as against one for a book."

"That's true, too," she acknowledged, after having made sure that she had control of her voice; for the note in that "you" had set her heart a-going, a-dancing. "What is a gentleman, anyhow?" she asked abruptly, taking flight.

"Hardly know," said Cyrus. "A friend of mine once said that what was wrong with a man he knew was that he too often used the word."

"I get that," said Mamie.

She had been so long a mere appendage of the Lake household that it amazed her to find how much she could get! But she would not ever, I should think, fall into the pit that has claimed more than one man of alert mind—would not ever, egged on by

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

that amazement at "getting" ideas, turn into a kind of human metronome. She handed back the cutting between thumb and index finger of her engaging hand—a dear little hand to Archer.

"Listen to this," he said, "you'll enjoy it"; and there, leaning against the door, he read from the book over which he had been bent on her arrival.

There were moments when she had, metaphorically, to pinch herself; for, ever and again, not what he read but just his voice seemed enough; not what he read, but the fact of the thing, of him leaning there reading to her, and her sitting there in his doorway looking down on Skookum Creek, seemed all that mattered. It was as though she went outside herself, saw herself sitting there and Cyrus Archer reading, and the shack for background, and the slopes behind—all as if it was a snapshot of a great occasion, a snapshot to be come upon in an album afterwards and the occasion recalled.

With a couple of books tucked under her

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

arm she returned home a couple of hours later, wondering much on the way how she could repay that good friend Archer for his kindness to her. She told herself that he was just like a big brother, this very seriously, almost sternly. There appeared to be nothing she could do for him—unless he broke the other leg! Nothing at all. He would never hear of her darning his socks; she dare not make the offer. He darned his socks for himself. She had seen him at it. Like all men, he used a very long piece of wool, necessitating, after every thrust of the needle, a stretching up of the arm to full length, sometimes even a sort of extension yank after that long pull.

She was immensely grateful to Mr. Archer. He had introduced her to herself. He addressed the self in her that had (deep within) waited for some one to speak, so that it might have assurance, be free, and come out into the air. No—there was nothing she could do, unless, maybe, seeing as work-days were such long ones, from m-up until after sun-down (for a man who works with horses has to see to their cleanli-

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

ness and comfort when the day's toil is over), unless, maybe, look after his tomatoes.

She would have to ask Aunt Lake and Uncle Lake what one should do to tomatoes to have them "make good." This was the thought with which she arrived home, but she felt a hesitancy in putting the question. Stupid! Why should she hesitate? Later on—later on she would inveigle Uncle Lake to air his views on tomato culture.

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## CHAPTER VI

### ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

SOMETIMES in the intense quiet of the mountain pocket Cyrus was suddenly gripped with a horror of losing her. The endless rush of Skookum Creek suggested to him thoughts upon the flight of life. The change in the light on the hills and peaks toward sunset—that terrible, that sudden putting out of the sunlight on some high front of cliff—these preached a kind of Jeremy Taylor sermon to him. The appearance of everlasting stability in the mountains did not act as antidote to the thoughts that came from the everlasting flux of the creek. Their immutable contours accentuated, instead, the pang he felt now in the late afternoons when the lights drifted and left shadow—were abruptly no more.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

The creek flowed past, flowed always, and set him wondering now what Destiny held in store for him. He was, at moments, perilously nearly in the state of mind that has sent young men and maidens to the Soothsayers and Fortune-tellers since time immemorial. They sought them in the days of Isaiah and in untold days before, even as they do (though is it not better, whatever the future, not to know?) in these our own times, when no carnival or fair is complete without one—and none infallible.

Would he, some day, far from here, look back, recall it all, and have no Mamie to turn to? These were tormenting speculations. Perhaps it is the very intensity of such thoughts, when they come, that is responsible for the temptation to smile at them—if they manifest themselves in others! A modern lover of paradox has pointed out how we jest at the serious when it is very serious, and has given it as his opinion that it is not heinous to do so. That may be so or not; but assuredly here was no jesting matter to Cyrus.

The sky, and the stars that studded it,

## ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

and the winds that came dropping down the slopes with refreshing, and with the murmur and scent of high pine-tops, seemed all mixed up in the wonderful malady. No, it was no malady—no malady so far as Mamie was concerned in it. The hint of malady was due not to her, but to Dulcie. He knew not how far he was committed with that charmer. He fretted much to decide for himself where Sense of Honour and Sense of Folly had their boundary line.

Dulcie seemed now to be but a woman, a pretty and perhaps seductive woman. Mamie was Mamie. He would refill his pipe, coming to that point, and try, by puffing slow and deliberate, to inveigle to his aid an aloof and judicial calm, somewhat as, it is said, without twiddling fingers or toes, for an hour at a stretch, so as to bring a little of the calm of Eternity over the flurry of the day's affairs, do the Japanese sages, sip milk and sit still.

The thought that it was Dulcie's part in the drama of his life, not Mamie's, that brought him this sense of upset, was a chief. Dulcie had flaunt of head, swing of

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

hips, flair in the almost raffish wearing of clothes ; Dulcie was something histrionic. She was chiefly limbs and movements that allured—and her eye allured. But it was all, that "come hither" of hers, a febrile affair. He knew so now, with Marnie coming and going before him (incidentally more physically fit, though that was not in his mind), and casting over him no spell, but being more precious to him than any spell-binder could ever be.

Even the twinkle of Dulcie's heels and the whirl of her gown had caught him in a queer way several times ; and Dulcie had been well aware. Dulcie could not have been happy did she not know, or at the worst imagine, that her passing frou-frou stirred a pulse. But now—now Cyrus saw her not as an individual ; she was a type—she was to be seen in many a picture gallery, done in oils and in pastel, to be seen in "Daughters of Mr. — (the railway magnate)," or in "Ellice and Clyde, daughters of Mr. — of Chicago," with carmine lips, taper fingers, and a subtle hint as of Spanish influence in the thrust forward of one hip. The

## ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

champagne picnic, too, was in their eyes, flicked in by the cunning and chic painter.

Up here in the mountains it struck Cyrus how much he had been infatuated by Paquin and Worth, by the surfaces that these very clever portrait painters know and catch, not troubling about anything below either the taffeta and silk of gown or the ivory of revealed bosom, maybe easing their consciences by saying: "Why should I, when that is my subject? There is the sitter! That really is she!"

It struck him that Dulcie had no great zest over the champagne-less lunch—Dulcie dead broke would be a horrible thought. She was a surface, so far as he was concerned at least, now that he had developed beyond surfaces. Beyond surfaces she would never go till age compelled. Her place was at the Armstrongs' table, in the Armstrongs' circle. They were *pâté de fois gras*, docked horses, aigret plumes people, without scruple or heed. They aimed at making a musical comedy of life; very pleasant people to know and be in the swim with, if one did not think deeply.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

To Cyrus, however, they now were like people attempting to live on the *aperitifs*; and that will not work. He had gone home from their house one night, when a very young man, haunted by Dulcie's hands peeling a pear in mitigated light. But Dulcie here—Dulcie sitting on the home-made stool at this shack door, looking down at the creek, its colours fading in the mountain twilight, and the tremendous sky offering no light repartee, giving no advice in the last fashionable word—he could not conceive of that at all. I do not think he weighed any consideration of Mamie there (as he had tried to picture Dulcie here); but if he had any such consideration, I am certain his picture of Mamie yonder showed her as simply, by her presence, making it pathetically evident that the nominal silver was tinsel, the *joie de vivre*—dope! Though, for myself, I fancy she would (with her adaptability and lack of self-consciousness, and engaging belief, when she didn't agree, that she was wrong) have made a hit, hardly consciously, come away saying what nice people they all were—but have had to

## ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

admit herself happy to get into the air again!

He drew a great sighing breath, inhaled the mountain air. It was this Dulcie in the background that made him so gravely restrained before Mamie. It was as though, back East there, he had tampered with Life—to no great purpose, maybe; but he had involved himself. For all he knew he might have a "weird to dree"; for all he knew, Sense of Honour, or Destiny, meant him to go from Mamie anon. Upon his devotion to her he must keep watch.

They were friends, Mamie and he; let it remain so. As long as they were no more—only friends—he could assure himself that he was neither untrue to Dulcie, to any possible commitment of his future to Dulcie, nor was he by way of being that most hateful creature—the male flirt. Thus went the Divine Comedy in his mind.

And here She came, up hill, tripping along as with winged feet, a book tucked under her arm. The sight of that volume recalled to his mind all the tales he had read (the original of which is a line or two in Dante)

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

about two young folks, heads together over some sage folio, suddenly thrusting aside the book of their mutual study and putting cheek to cheek. The thought irritated him. These stories were not his story.

So he was thinking ; and behold in the book that Mamie brought back to him was a passage that had caught her somehow, a description of an old English village. Turning over the pages she murmured that she would like some day to see that land. Her eyes were bright with pictures of it—a land of old churches and inns, with gabled homes clustering round them, gorsy commons, and patterned fields, old oaks and elms and beech-groves, and low green hills. He wanted to say : " I will work like hell and make the dough to take you if——," but he wore the mask.

" How old it must seem—in another way from ~~this~~ land," said she. " This makes you think what a little while man lives and how awful old the world is ; but a country like that must make you think how long man has been going on. Some folk would get sad reading this book, but—where is it ?

## ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

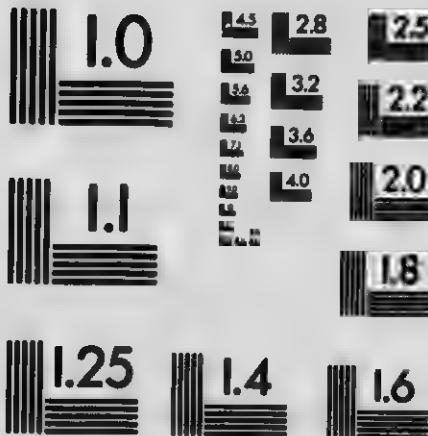
—yea, what's the meaning of *gostor*, please?" she parenthetically inquired, and, the explanation over, continued: "But it didn't make me sad. It seems right sacred. Here it is . . . the thought of sleep in the home churchyard, at least, dead cheek by dead cheek, and with the rain soaking in upon one from above. . . . It takes ages and ages of people living in a country to make a man write like that about it. It didn't strike me as sad. It was . . ."

He wondered afterwards what she continued to say; he did not hear; but he couldn't ask her to repeat, because that might have given the impression that he did not trouble to listen. The reason he lost it was that he was musing: "As she came up the path, with that paragraph in her mind, I was thinking of cheek by cheek too!"

That night, after Mamie and all Skookum Creek slept, Cyrus (her presence still hauntingly with him) knew definitely that whatever the future held for him he must never, never get out of touch with Mamie Lake. She might need him! She might need some one to render her a service. He did



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## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

not ask himself what it might be. He felt merely that she might be in need, some day, of some one—to render her a service, asking nothing in return. And he—Cyrus Archer—he must be within call—nay more: she must know that if she so required one she could call to him!

But from the borders of the maudlin, he, with his vigour, turned away. At the thought that he might say to her: "Let me be a brother to you—promise me that at least," he said "Pshaw!" to himself, punched the pillow, counted ten, and fell asleep; for one must sleep; a blethering idiot can render service to no one.

Wakening in the middle of the night to the tremendous silence of the place, threaded by the hushing sound of Skookum Creek, he wondered what had brought him out of his slumber. His first waking thought was, in a word, "Mamie"! Was it perhaps telepathy? Was something wrong with her? Abruptly, then, there came the long howl of a coyote disfiguring the night. Ah, that was it; doubtless the coyote had howled before.

## ARCHER'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

That small sound seemed to fill the world, dismal, desolate, hinting at the uncanny. No, there would be nothing wrong with Mamie. She was fast asleep. But, he mused, there was still deep reason for memory of her being his first waking thought. There was indeed. Here was not telepathy; here was devotion. And it occurred to him that now always, on wakening, it was with Mamie that his mind was occupied.

Thus he assured himself, on the one hand, that all was well with her at that moment; but, on the other, he pled guilty to the charge of ousting, or displacing, Dulcie. Oh, tortured night! The coyote wailed again away up in the hills, suggesting, to the human ear, infinite sorrows and regrets. Again the beast bayed, farther off; and as the creepy crescendo ended it supplied him with a picture of the big night outside. He had a vision of the whole mountain range, all the ranges, from Alaska to Mexico—and the Andes taking up the tale again under the Southern Cross in place of the Pole star, a vision of this half of the world in darkness

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

pricked with stars, and the other half alight,  
but all mysterious.

“God bless her!”

He really spoke the words aloud; and  
then tucking the blankets anew under his  
shoulder he left it all so, and again slept.

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## CHAPTER VII

### A SHOT AND A CRY

THE tomatoes "made good." I forget the text-book word for these little shoots that you nip off, but anyhow Mamie examined them daily, and nipped. By doing that you give all the strength of the plant to your fruit. Of course, they were only a side-line. Archer told Mrs. Lake that any time she wanted some she was just to come over and take her pick; but she gave him such a fierce glare as she thanked him for this kind offer, that he realised that anything in the way of payment for her service to him was out of the question. However, she did run in partnership with her husband a kind of eating-house—perhaps he could pay the business, as it were, for his meals; that seemed a decent proposition. Though they don't live exactly, as was suggested

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

did the inhabitants of some place or another, by taking in each other's washing—though these cities of half a dozen shacks are very definitely related to the outside world, on a system of give and take with it—there is business done between the inhabitants.

Still, it appeared that the eating-house had not fed him—it was Mrs. Lake, and Lazy Lake as neighbours, not as partners of an eating-joint. She nearly looked his head off when he began : " How much do I owe—" so he changed it to : " I want to settle up with you—" ; but her expression was so vindictive that he finally said : " It is only right that I should pay you for those meals." He spoke with great daring.

" Well, you ain't going to," she answered. " Didn't you have an accident ? Me take money from you, after all you done for that there Mamie too ? I don't know how to bring her up the way she ought to be brought up—and Lake don't know either ; he's lost track of all them things."

" I've done nothing for her," said Archer.

## A SHOT AND A CRY

"For the Land's sake!" she cried.  
"Ain't she learnt to talk different, so as to  
wake up Lake at last?"

Archer showed puzzlement.

"Yes, sir—didn't you know?" she asked.  
"After she came home talking about them  
books you'd been reading to her" (he had  
only read a little, he thought, when she  
came in in the midst of his reading and  
remarked: "You look interested, what are  
you reading?"). "Yes—siree, after she  
came back all eager about that, he sent  
out for a lot of books for her too. 'You  
shall have some,' he says, 'seein' you're  
interested enough.'"

Here was a new twist to the business.  
Many are the sides to human beings.

"Oh, well," Archer said, covering up the  
depths of his heart that might have shown,  
"any time you want fresh tomatoes just  
you walk across."

The tomatoes were the jumping-off place  
for other affairs, and though they were to  
become a side-line to Cyrus, instead of  
a shaky standby, they showed him the  
hearts of Skookum Creek. Punchy Jones,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

when Archer was teaming again, said to him one morning in the yard :

" Where are you sellin' them tomatos of yours ? "

" Why, in Skookum City ! " said Archer.

" Oh ! " answered Jones. " I see you the other day, a-scrambling up the other side there, with a couple of boxes before the up-train came through the pass. Selling them to that there Dago ? "

Punchy was the kind of man who said " that there Dago," " that there Chink," " that there Coon," in the same tone as he might have said " that there dirt "; but people who knew him knew well that Dago, Chink, or Coon had only to be up against it and, bless your heart, there was no more of that manner about Punchy. The point was, at present, that he thought from what he knew of that " Eye-talian fruit-store skinner," as he called him presently, that Archer could obtain better prices elsewhere, and he was going out himself that very day to Spokane Ford—where there was competition in fruit stores. He explained his question now by telling Cyrus so.

## A SHOT AND A CRY

"What's the matter with me doing a dicker for you at Spokane Ford?" he added.  
"Putting them there fruit-store men up to auction for you?"

He produced a cigar and bit the end off.

"It is very good of you, but I don't see why you should trouble yourself," said Cyrus.

"Tain't no trouble. I'm going down there anyhow to look into a contractor business that's for sale, and I've always felt kind of responsible for your leg getting broken. Ought to have fired that James feller when he had his spill, only he's a good teamster—there's no getting away from it. He can handle the lines, and any man's liable to a spill up in them almighty hills. I suppose it was me cracking up your skill on the high seat that put the final touch on his grouch. What's that there Eve-talian fruit-store skinner giving you anyhow?"

And at that they entered into a discussion on dollars and tomatoes. That afternoon off went Punchy Jones to board the Saghalie-Skookum City once-daily in the summer, twice-weekly in the winter,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

passenger train, with his shoes well polished, his best black satinet shirt on, and best white tie, his face shaven and shining, and his eyes bright and speculating under his best hat, kept for such out-going occasions. He would probably bring back another one, and that now on his head would lapse into second place and announce to those who understood that Punchy had recently been to town.

We do not go with him. We stay in Skookum Creek, to listen in the meanwhile to the chirr of the grasshoppers, which by now we can hear under the roaring of the creek—though that, by the way, is a bit of an "Irish bull," for the creek was not roaring now, but gurgling and splashing rather, as the year wore on, diminishing in breadth, with a ribbon of rocks on each side of it, its own bed drying.

When Lazy Lake took anything up that appealed to him he found it difficult to drop it. He made habits. Even his annual jaunt up into the mountains to put in assessment work on his claims had come to be to him like a beloved habit, and if he ever

## A SHOT AND A CRY

happened to sell one of these claims, were it for six figures, he would doubtless, endorsing the cheque, be visited by a thought of: "Well, there's an end of going up to that old spur of mountain for me!" He was glad, for Archer's sake, to see that young man wagging up the hill a-top the wagon, but he missed the pleasure of dropping in on him to smoke and talk, and let the sun go over.

After his recovery Cyrus batched no more. Perhaps Mrs. Lake's cooking had become a habit to him; anyhow, in her capacity as eating-house lady she now made up for him, daily, his lunch-pail. At her table he ate supper, or if he was late for that last meal, she saw to it that his portions were set aside to await his arrival. But, supper over, Lake now gravitated toward him, strolled with him through the twilit bushes over to the shack, the light in the window of which would soon prank one more sparkle to announce to the stars human inhabitants of that mountain-locked place.

Mamie too, her assistance in washing-up and chores over for the day, would announce

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

to her aunt : " Guess I'll go along to Archer's and come back with Uncle Leslie." But on arrival there was always some talk to listen to, and Lake allowed her to be exception to his rule. He did not now freeze up when she came in, did not say : " Oh, there you are, Mamie. Well, we'll get over. Good-night, Archer." How much Cyrus had to do with this state of affairs I would not like to say. So the girl silently listened to many a discussion upon what the essayists call Books and Life, listened to many an unwritten article of the kind that you get in volumes with such titles as " Views and Opinions," " Thoughts and Speculations."

Lake, though going on with the talk in her presence, seemed never to see her, and apparently she wished that Archer would just go on talking to her uncle without turning to include her. She took great interest in these views and opinions, and very deep interest in personal matters she heard the men discuss. Already she had—thanks to coming in upon that scene in the shack in which not only an Indian dance was in progress, but into which there entered

## A SHOT AND A CRY

papers, pens, and ink—discovered that this young man, who had come to mean so much to her, was upon a great employment, in his spare time, gathering data regarding the old life, the manners and customs of the shy aborigines.

Since then she had learnt more from Archer about his serious work. There were to be chapters on their games, on shamanism, secret societies, old-time customs of barter, herbal remedies. When Lake, hanging on to his old beliefs one night, remarked, on being to go: "Well, you keep your thumb up it, Archer, or people will think you crazy. What's the sense to it? they will ask you," she, who had been so greatly silent, daringly disagreed.

"They won't say anything of the kind," she said, "or they'd be fools. They'd be crazy. Whether the Indians are going to die out or not, their ways of living will change, sure thing. What's the sense to it? they'd ask, would they? Isn't there sense in knowing how folks have lived, and what they've thought, and the dreams they've dreamt, even though they've done

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

it kind of fumbling? I guess the wisest, civilised shaman will seem a groping sort of guy to some shaman two hundred years hence, just the same as these Indian notions seem kind of childlike to our wise men."

Cyrus, who was standing, looked at her directly as she spoke; Lake, listening, but quizzing, gave her a sidelong twinkle.

"What does it matter anyhow?" he inquired, to draw her out.

She nodded her head at him.

"You're only talking now," she said. "You know it matters a whole lot. If it wasn't for folks being interested in things like that, they might just as well go and eat grass. Don't you keep your thumb on it, Mr. Archer," she advised. "Don't you be one way or another about it, neither hiding it, nor shooting it off to everybody you meet. That's what I say. If they like to go away and laugh—well, what does it matter? And even supposing the most of them did that, there's some of them would feel kind of good, thinkin' they knew a little more, anyhow, getting nearer to some notion of what was to it all."

## A SHOT AND A CRY

"To what?" asked Lazy Lake, hanging on desperately to his quizzing mood.

Archer thought he should have dropped that; and he answered, for Mamie, at the same moment that she answered for herself, so that their voices came out in a duet: "Life!"

Lake clapped her shoulder.

"Come along home, then, Mamie," he said, with affection.

That was on the night following the afternoon when Punchy went "out." The next evening Lake announced, more in furrow-browed contemplation of private matters than in objective scrutiny of the universe: "Mrs. Lake's been chewing the rag."

Archer merely glanced, but did not ask for elucidation.

"Yes," said Lake, "heart to heart talk with me this morning—did I think I was doing the fair thing by Mamie? 'What way?' I asked. All very well, she told me, to let a child run wild, but couldn't I see Mamie was different? I said: 'Well, hang it all, I got some books for her the other day!' She said that was all very well,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

but I ought to talk better at home. ' It don't matter about me,' she declared. ' My father was an old Nevada prospector, shot his man, and pulled out for the Bloody Bend. Don't matter about me—your talk's all right for me. Guess I couldn't understand anything else. Kind of strains my brain.' " He stopped. " She's a white woman," he interjected, then nodded his head twice at Archer. " You've done it, you know," he said.

" I ? " exclaimed Cyrus.

" Well, I won't argue the point with you," replied Lake. " I'll only tell you what she said. She absolutely threw you in my teeth with something of the expression that an amateur at cards has when he produces the ten-spot at the psychological moment. ' Can't you see,' she asked, ' the new interest in things that has come since that Archer fellow talked to her ? ' " He shook his head. " Cross-purposes, Archer," he said. " I answered, ' Why, of course I do. It was that gave me the filip to get these books for her. I've acknowledged my remissness to myself, I've acknowledged

## A SHOT AND A CRY

that I may have been wrong. You don't want me to go down in abasement on my knees about it, do you ? ' and she said : ' Remissness ? Abasement ? I'm not sure that I know what it means, but I guess you oughter. I guess we both been wrong. I made a start on her to-day. I got her hair up.' "

He shook his head a second time.

" Archer," he said, " it would make you weep. You should see the child. The braids were all right, but this—my God ! You see, Mrs. Lake got her notion of style from a very raffish biscuit-shooter when I first toted her out from the back of beyond, and she's never forgotten her. It was her introduction to coiffing, bar the newspaper drawings. It's stayed with her all these years, the climax of the tonsorial art. My God ! Grotesque ! And the trouble is that it's so well intentioned."

" What does Miss Lake think of it ? " asked Archer.

" That's about what she thinks too—well intentioned ; and she wouldn't hurt her aunt's feelings for anything. So she's got

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

it up on top of pads and pins and what-not. Tell you what it is—it would make her the belle of a Kaffir kraal! Oh, I've a letter for you," he said suddenly. "Gregory gave it to me."

Gregory has not figured in the story so far; there was no need for him to, as he is only a super. Archer took the letter now held out to him, glanced at the writing, laid it on the table, then glanced at it again.

"You can read it. We'll have our yarn afterwards," said Lake.

"Thank you, if you don't object."

Lake executed a bow that pre-dated what he called his piking off from the Atterberry outfit. He was beginning to think that perhaps in quitting the circle he had been born in, and its ways, he had overdone the swing. Cyrus read the letter, fixing his face to look as if it was neither here nor there, in a way he imagined to be masklike; and at last, with too great gentleness of gesture, he laid the letter down upon the table. It evidently angered him, or at any rate moved him considerably.

"Yes," he said, reverting to his visitor's

## A SHOT AND A CRY

conversation. "There's the making of a very fine woman in your niece."

"Now that's where I disagree with you," replied Lake. "That's where your ethics and mine don't jump. Do you remember what Emerson says somewhere, that you can't teach anybody what they don't know already? That's the way I look at it."

"But there is such a thing as development," Archer pointed out.

Lake snorted, getting back to his old obsession.

"It's only a matter of finger bowls," he opined. "Some have them, some don't. I believe you're trying to improve Mamie, aren't you? Definitely trying?"

Cyrus pondered this.

"Well," he acknowledged slowly, "putting things in her way

"Developing her?" asked Lake.

"Giving her the chance to develop," Archer dared, and added: "You're doing so yourself, of course, now that you've got her some books at last. And so is Mrs. Lake, with the—"

"Oh, that! But you admit you are

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

developing her?" he went on. "If you are not deliberately teaching her you are giving her an opportunity to learn, intentionally?"

"Well?" said Archer, in a tone as of: "For the purposes of argument we'll say yes!"

"Shaping her for whom?" inquired Lake.

"Not shaping," Cyrus contradicted. "I deny it. Giving her a chance to develop."

"For herself?" persisted Lake.

"For herself," replied Archer. "I, as an onlooker, saw long ago what you have now wakened to."

"I only ask," said Lake, "because I'm a little sceptical. I had an inclination myself once to try to do what they call educate Mrs. Lake, and then I said: 'Why? Isn't it what she is that I'm fond of—what she is in herself?'" and his eyes had a far look, contemplating his own love-story. "Why should I educate her, just so as to be able to tote her back into the circle I was born in?"

"If you ask me," said Archer, "so as to make her feel at ease there too, especially

## A SHOT AND A CRY

seeing that your belief is that in herself—what she is, as apart from what is called deportment, and so on—she's as good as they."

" You're a white man, all right ! " exclaimed Lake. " I wondered if you were going to say so that I should not be ashamed of her in that set. Well, just for argument, then," he continued, " you wouldn't be ashamed to see Mamie—for, by God, I may have been wrong in my notion of bringing her up, but it was not through lack of affection—you wouldn't be ashamed to introduce her as a friend to your set, would you ? "

Archer considered this, and as the French say the cape were over the windmill. Unaware that he was saying of Mamie what Lake had once said of that white daughter of a tough, he answered : " My dear sir, I could die if need be for what your wife calls that homely little girl."

It was a solemn moment, but Lake was erratic, and even when deeply moved, or realising that others were deeply moved, he would persist in giving way to his turn for a kind of blend of cynicism and persiflage.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

He had believed in a man here and there, but he was sceptical of humanity. He now raised his hand about twelve inches over his head.

"Ah, but you haven't seen her with her hair pulled up to here!" he commented.

And at that moment, even as one reads in the serial stories (which are often nearer truth than you might imagine, for in life, too, things do happen that way), there broke out on the night the driving snap of a colt, with a rasping echo among the foothill rocks, and a woman's scream of: "Archer! Uncle!"

Archer leapt to his bunk, Lake to the lamp, which he blew out with a puff down the chimney; and he knew the sound that came from the bunk—Archer's thumb whirling and feeling in the darkness, on the barrel of his revolver. Then the two men shouldered together in the doorway.

"Watch yourself!" cautioned Lake as they blundered downhill in the direction whence the cry had come. "Whoever it is, they may lay for you."

## A SHOT AND A CRY

"To hell with that!" said the young man of choice speech, stumbling on.

Peering, and following close behind, Lake replied: "Oh no, you want to get him—not him you."

"Here!" called Mamie.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

SHE was down in a bush; the two men could see her face in the star-sheen, very pale. They stumbled to her, stooped over her.

"Get down," she said, in quivering voice, "he might shoot again. He's up there."

It was relief to them to make out that she could stand if she cared, that she was crouching, not prostrate.

"Where?" asked Lake.

"Up that way," she answered, pointing to the opposite hill, expelled her breath, clearly in pain, and fell back.

"She's been hit!" cried Cyrus Archer, veering back to his clutching dread after the first sudden relief.

In failing voice that dwindled off to a whisper, she just managed to get out: "Felt like a hot iron."

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

Down below them now, here, there, were upright parallelograms of light in those shacks the doors of which faced uphill, and shadows of people showing and gone against these lights. It might be an "off the map" city; but the century was the twentieth, and the bark of a gun after dark, to say nothing of a woman's scream, was by no means a casual matter. The combination certainly demanded inspection. Voices called. A stable lamp showed here and there.

"Here you are," shouted Lake, and the inhabitants came plunging, a broken set of silhouettes, the rays of two lamps playing tricks with them as they scrambled to the spot. There was no thought in their minds, or if it came for the moment it was immediately dismissed, of any one lurking in the vicinity shooting haphazard and maniacal into that confused shadow-show of human figures sprayed upon by the light of the stable-lanterns.

At first, indeed, there was little but consternation and puzzlement in the crowd; the enigma offered to those who came

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

plunging up deep-breathing round them was merely of a shot, a cry, and Tomato Archer and Lazy Lake lifting Mamie.

"Somebody fired at her and ran up hill there," said Lake to them, alleviating their consternation over the tableau, but not explaining the riddle.

They carried her to the Lakes' house, for that was the first thing to be done; and it was found that her shoulder had been scarred by a bullet, but only slightly scarred. With a bandage and some witch-hazel, Mrs. Lake set to work to staunch the bleeding; and the picture of the homely little thing propped there helpless went tremendously into Archer's heart. It was a dear face to him, with something arrestingly pathetic about it as she lay there unconscious—after the effect of shock, thank God, and not from any grievous wound—a pathetic little face under that bizarre coiffing which was the effort of Mrs. Lake to give her a square deal. Presently she opened her eyes and murmured something. Archer plucked Lake's lapel and drew him to one side.

"I'm not going to wait to hear who it

~~CANCELLED~~

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

was," he said. "She's all right now, I think."

"Look here!" replied Lake. "Steady yourself. Take the advice of a man who has been up against one or two little bits of trouble in his time. You can't beat the bush for an armed man, or run amok in the darkness. That's not the way to get him."

"I know better than that," said Archer. "I'm going right over to the Reserve to-night. Whoever the man is, he's going to burn the trail, and I'm going to get an Indian tracker over here by morning."

Lake considered this with less displeasure than he had considered what he imagined to be Archer's plan.

"Something in that," he agreed. "Keep your eye lifting for him on the way over." Then he looked round at those in the room, and clustering at the door. In his relief over the returning consciousness of his niece he was half jocular in intonation as he remarked: "It doesn't seem to be any citizen of Skookum Creek who went off the handle, anyhow."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

They were, indeed, apparently all there. Archer pushed through the knot of men.

"How is she, Archer?"

"Coming round," he told them over his shoulder, and ploughed away among the stumps, down an uneven rut in the hillside which figured on the plan of the place as Fifth Avenue.

He knew Fifth Avenue fairly well, with its inequalities and stones, and, out of the lamp-light again, his eyes were soon accustomed to the darkness. There was a perfect fury raging in his heart; and within twenty minutes he put foot to stirrup, and swung to the back of Punchy's saddle-horse. As he rode out of the yard he saw, opposite, two shadow shapes that looked like burglars in the wilderness — one, propped against the wall of the shanty that bore upon its shingle the legend: "Jessie Debrett Mines Office," and another, kneeling on the shoulders of that live ladder, trying to force up the window. It was the ladder who spoke.

"Keep your eye lifting for him, Archer."

"Oh, that you Gregory?"

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

Evidently if Gregory was helping in the house-breaking he was blatant about it. The shadow prising open the window next spoke.

"Going to telephone to Skookum City," came Lake's voice. "If the sheriff isn't there I'll ring up Spokane Ford. He can be up here by—"

"By sun-up," put in the ladder. "They got an auto-mo-beel down there now. Hell!" This because Lake, in making the final spring off, dug heels into Gregory's shoulders.

"Who do you reckon to get?" called Lake, putting his head out of the window. "There's a very good hand at tracking over there known as Tom Grass."

"Why, Lame Knee, of course," replied Archer, and waited for no more. "The poor girl had on his moccasins to-night," he added, and next moment, riding away, hoped they had lost that. It sounded, somehow, a trifle silly to the undemonstrative young man.

The sheriff was not at Skookum City, and the clerk at Skookum Hotel, on to

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

whom they got, in the most matter-of-fact tones, yet with a certain regret in his voice, said : " We've got a city policeman here, of course, but there ain't been nothing doing in his line for some time, and it's preyed on his constitution. I guess he couldn't move till the morning, anyhow, for he's got a jag on now."

So they rang up Spokane Ford, and found the sheriff. He could move. Yes, they would come up by auto, if Skookum Creek could provide horses.

" We can provide horses—and arsenal too," ripped Lake ; and he went back feeling hopeful, picturing to himself, away and away and away down there, beyond Horse Thief Creek and Skokum City, and Duck Lake, the automobile setting out from Spokane Ford, with blazing head-lights illumining the pines like passing limelight on a stage, rocking and ploughing, brake on, brake off, upon the first lap toward retribution.

It made him grit his teeth with a wild pleasure as he returned across the tremendous quiet of that pocket in the mountains, with

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

Skookum Creek babbling and murmuring to the peace. As to who the villain of the story was, Mamie, now propped on pillows, exorbitant head-gear if not flattened at least less terrible, could not say. She could only tell that half-way across to Archer's shack a man leapt up and fired at her.

"I believe he saw it was a woman the moment after he brought down his gun," she said. "Otherwise I'd have been—"

"For the Land's sake don't talk about that!" ejaculated Mrs. Lake.

"Well, that's right," said Mamie. "I heard him say, 'Oh ——! I made sure it was somebody else!' I think he was going to come to help me if every one hadn't started running."

Never, on Mamie's lips, had there been such an oath as this she repeated now with simple truthfulness. The quaint pathos of her figure brought a long, thoughtful look to the face of Lazy Lake.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"Telephoning for the sheriff."

"Some of them wanted to go and beat

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

the bush for him, but they've promised me that they won't. Where's Cy—Mr. Archer?"

Lake glanced at his wife.

"Hasn't he been around here?" he inquired of her.

She met his eyes, and was guarded.

"Didn't he go out with you to telephone?" she suggested.

"He *was* around," said Lake to Mamie, with a smile. "Helped me to carry you down. Guess he's gone home."

The pallid Mamie had a chapfallen look, but she said nothing.

"You got to go to sleep now, and not worry till morning," commanded Mrs. Lake, wagging a finger.

And she did, anon, fall into some kind of troubled slumber. When she opened her eyes again the new day had come and the risen sun was casting the shadow of the window-frame across the floor. It was an unwonted sound that woke her. She wondered what it was as she slipped across the frontier of sleep and waking, dimly remembered something had been wrong.

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

blinked her eyes, opened them again, recalled all, but still wondered what the sound might be that she could hear above what now, in high summer, was but the prattle of Skookum Creek. Then it ceased. Or had it ceased? She could not be sure whether her ears were playing her a trick or not. It seemed to go on for a space, but on a subdued note. There! That too had stopped! Whatever could it be? She put up her hand and felt the bandage on her shoulder, turned her head to look at it; there was only the faintest sign of blood to be seen, but she had to admit that she had no great inclination to get up. Still, it was not late yet; she knew by the sundial of the window-frame on her bedroom floor.

"Are you there, auntie?" she called, and for all reply was the mew of the only cat of Skookum Creek.

That meant there was nobody around, so she rose to open the door and give it entrance. It arched its back and looked up at her in morning welcome, rubbed atilt against her ankles, and as she dressed—a little worried over this early absence of the house's tenants

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

after last night's escapade—rubbed against the chair-legs, the table legs, all round the room. She had just finished dressing when she heard outside a voice she recognised, the voice of Punchy Jones.

"Oh yes, ma'am," he was saying, "you see I had gone on from Skookum City to Spokane Ford, and I was just having a final glass of—of—raspberry sundae—"

"I guess," said Mrs. Lake.

"—with the sheriff here, when the messenger came around looking for him. I had to pull out with him on the automobile when I heard there was trouble in quiet Skookum Creek."

"I'll just see if she's wakened," Mrs. Lake remarked.

"Don't you disturb the young lady," came another man's voice, "but just in a formal way if I could put a few questions to her—"

Mamie made exit to the parlour.

"Why, there you are!" said Mrs. Lake at the door. "Come right in, sheriff, and you too, Mr. Jones. This is Sheriff Peters, Mamie."

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

The sheriff doffed and bowed.

"Say," said Mamie, with a nod to the following Punchy, "what was the meaning of the sound I heard just now? Never heard anything like it in my life."

"What sound?" asked Mrs. Lake.  
"When?"

"About half an hour ago. A crackling sound, tearing along—made me think of a June bug as big as a mountain, clicking on steady instead of in spasms."

Jones looked over his shoulder to Lazy Lake who now, having made up on them, came into the room.

"I tell you what it is, Lake," he said. "I'm going to lodge a protest right now. Here's Miss Mamie stowed away in an out-of-the-way corner of the world, and never heard an automobeel before. It ain't a square deal. You got to take her out and give her a whizz in one."

He gave his reprimand with a world of gaiety.

"Oh, that was an automobeel!" said Mamie. "Well, I guess I'll see one now, anyhow."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"I guess," replied the sheriff, "that when this job's over I'll be very happy to give you, young lady, and your mother," he bowed to Mamie's aunt, "what Jones here calls a whizz a bit down the road and back again—if it seems any fun to you to be knocked about like a pea in a bladder. That wagon-road ain't exactly what you'd call a racing track."

And after these pleasant preliminaries the sheriff put a question or two, to his own satisfaction, to this big-eyed and, to-day at least, pale-faced witness of the event.

"Then you have no idea at all who it might be?" he asked.

"I got it!" burst out Punchy suddenly, "you're all off the scent, sheriff, as I guess you see by this time. If you had any think in the back of your mind that you're on to one of these there tales of the jealous wooer——"

"Oh, pshaw!" cried Peters, as if Punchy Jones was talking foolishness about his reasons for wishing to question, personally, the young lady of the case.

"I got it!" repeated Punchy. "You

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

don't need to ask her any more questions till I come back."

Away he sped with alacrity. Lake lured the sheriff outside to chat.

"I hope they won't shoot him if they catch him," said Mamie to her aunt.

"Don't see why they shouldn't," Mrs. Lake out of her affection replied.

"Well, he didn't really shoot me, whoever he is," said Mamie. "Perhaps he didn't mean anything—perhaps he was drunk, and didn't know what he was doing. Has the sheriff brought up a posse?"

"Posse! He brought up two men with him, but I guess all Skookum Creek's his posse. They've all been around asking after you this morning, all itching to get away."

"Have they?" asked Mamie. "That's right good of them. Mr. Gregory been around?"

"Yap."

"And Mr. Ellis?"

"Yap."

"And Mr. Fox?"

"Yap."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"And that new teamster? I don't know his name."

"It's a curious thing," said Mrs. Lake, "you should be inquirin' if a man whose name you don't know has been around."

The girl had the look of one caught for a moment.

"Do you like the looks of the new teamster?" asked her aunt. "Kind of struck on him?"

Mamie had the expression of one relieved.

"Yes—not a bad young fellow," she laughed, to blur her trail, as she thought, the more effectively. "Tomato Archer been around?" she added casually.

"Oh, I guess he'll come around yet."

Her mouth seemed to droop, just a hint and no more. Turning her head away suddenly she saw, out of the window, across the creek, the man of whom she spoke coming down on the lope, with Lame Knee; and her heart gave a jump. That was why he hadn't been here last night when she came round; he had ridden over to the Reserve, in the dark, for Lame Knee. There was a rising of voices outside. She heard Jones

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

saying : " That's right—that's what it is. I wouldn't bet on it ; wouldn't be fair ; it's a certainty. It just came into my head."

" You look kind of shaky," commented Mrs. Lake. " I must get you to eat some breakfast. Time we got breakfast ready."

Punchy Jones' shadow showed in the doorway, and then stopped.

" Oh, there you are, sheriff," came his voice to those within the room. " I can tell you who the fellow is."

" Oh, you can, can you ? Proof ? On oath ? "

" Well, I wouldn't say on oath, but what do you know about this ? I fired one of my teamsters a while back for filing through the hub-pin on a wagon."

" What did he do that for ? " asked Peters.

" So as to give a throw to a better driver than himself. I fired him out, and I let him off too light. I told him at the time he had better pull his freight out of the State. When I got into Skookum City three days ago I found he hadn't got any farther than there, so I looked at him, and I said :

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

' You'd better shake a leg out of here. You're a punk driver compared with the man you laid up.' Him and me had a bit of a tussel before, and I think he was considering having another. ' You'd better pull your freight out of this State,' I told him, and then I saw his boss coming down the street. ' What's this ? ' he asked, and when he heard the story he gave the feller his dough right there."

" Well ? What's this got to do with it ? " said the sheriff.

" I just been ringing up his boss to see if he knows about him. He tells me he didn't pull out that day. He hung around town throwing shots into himself, and yesterday morning my friend saw him hitting out on the wagon-road in this direction. The only way he could be coming out here would be to that there lumber camp. I called them up, asked if they'd taken on any men recently. They're not taking on—they're laying off. I asked them if they thought any one would hit out of town on chance, without inquiring at the office there first, and the feller at the other end

## FOR MAMIE—AND FOR JUSTICE

of the wire says he reckons not—unless he was a deaf-mute, and blind, for everybody can see and hear in town that the men are coming in instead of going out."

" I see," said the sheriff. " And the young lady says that all she made out of the man was that he made a mistake in the dark. You think he was hitting up for the shack of the man he had his mad up against ? Hullo ! What's this ? "

Mrs. Lake's curiosity was roused at the tone of these last words, and she passed to the door ; Mamie guessed what had brought forth the final words, and followed.

" You are the man that rode over for the tracker—and this is the tracker ! " Sheriff Peters was saying, standing there beside the gable.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE THING IN THE CREEK

ARCHER, by no means worn out after his night's ride, greatly sustained by his intention of revenge for that attack upon Mrs. Lake's homely little girl, drew in his chair to breakfast. Mamie had desired it, and he succumbed to her and his hunger. Lame Knee was along the hill there, already at the beginning of things, wandering about humped and slightly intoed, a figure half-dilapidated, half-majestic, unravelling the trail of the man who had so much upset the peace of Skookum Creek, isolating his tread from the general tramping tangle of footmarks left by the citizens last night. He, too, had a personal grouch against the unknown who had left these footmarks which he now followed out of that maze, though in the presence of strange white men his face

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

showed little. He expressed none of his own feelings. He was merely the average Indian to a casual glance, breathing through curved nostrils, looking at the ground with hard black eyes that had a flame in them. They suggested agate. He pointed, and walked on uphill.

By tilting a chair where she sat at the table, Mamie could just see out of the door how he progressed. She turned round and looked at Archer, who had come the length of hot cakes which she had prepared in spite of her shoulder, and never had he tasted anything like them. It seemed to her that his eyes were on her hair. Coiffing was a secondary matter this morning, to be sure, but she wondered what he thought of it. Mrs. Lake had made such a genuine fuss over the design and arrangement, and the quantity of hair available for stacking up, that Mamie had submitted herself to all these elevated inches rather than give a set-back to her aunt's good intentions. This morning, dressing it for herself, however, she had tried, if not to effect a compromise, to begin a diminution of the awfulness of it.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"How do you like the style of doing my hair?" she asked.

"I liked you in pig-tails," said Cyrus, "but it suits you done up. Only—well, seeing you asked me, don't you think it's a little too high?"

As Mamie put up a hand, pressing the arrangement down on top, Mrs. Lake broke out: "Now you're asking somebody that can tell. It's such a long time since I saw any high-toned folks. You give her your opinion, Mr. Archer, and don't be scared."

He drew a breath and cleared his throat; the artist in him would have liked to have taken those tresses and arranged them simply to frame the charm of her face, instead of to make them be, as it were, an anomaly in hair.

"He don't like it!" exclaimed Mrs. Lake, watching him. "Well, I did my best. Lake, here, don't express no opinion."

"I think I agree with Archer," her husband said now.

Mrs. Lake shook her head at him. A transfiguring glow was on her.

"That's Lake's way," she explained to

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

Cyrus. "He thinks all them things don't matter. 'You can't tell one baby from another,' he says, 'if it wasn't for the colour of the ribbon on its clothes!'"

Archer smiled pleasantly.

"Considering," said he gently, "that the hair is Miss Lake's own, I would suggest that her taste might get to work on it."

"But who is to give her any pointers?" asked Mrs. Lake. "Me and Lake never studied them things. I tell you what we'll do," she went on, turning to her husband, "we'll go down to Spokane Ford and stay at that there new hotel I've heard tell about—the Western Delmonico—and rubber-neck around at the fashions."

Mamie had really other thoughts all the while.

"Are you going out after this man?" she inquired in a level voice, for she could see the others mounting, and the sheriff was walking toward the house.

Archer merely gave a nod, stuck out his chin, and glanced at Lake, who did likewise.

"What will you do to him if you catch him?" said Mamie.

*CANCELLED*

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Lake gloomed, rising to his feet.

"I think it was a mistake getting the sheriff up, after all," he remarked. "Skookum Creek should be able to look after these things for itself. We didn't trouble the sheriff so much down on the Rio Pecos, did we?" he asked his wife.

She gave him a glance of "No, we did not!" then looked at Mamie.

"Perhaps he'll put up a fight," said Archer, addressing Lake.

"Hope so," the other growled.

"You would shoot him?" persisted Mamie, still in that level voice.

The men made no answer for a space, and then: "He deserves it," said Archer.

"I don't see why," said Mamie.

The men were obviously taken aback, and so—though perhaps a shade less obviously—was Mrs. Lake. It was, however, she who tried to explain.

"The sheriff may be doing it for law and order," she said, "but all the boys of Skookum Creek are doing it for you." And then she added, in case she had made a mistake by that (for she believed that part

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

of the policy of a guardian or of a mother was to avoid anything that might nurture vanity) : " Though I can't see why they should, you homely critter."

Mamie wilted. Archer marked her expression, and though he was sufficiently alert to character to realise the reason for the woman's addendum, he thought it a great mistake, mistaken kindness which savoured of brutality ; only, of course, Mrs. Lake did not understand, did not see what a sensitive little thing this was.

" You won't kill him ? " persisted Mamie, looking from one man to the other.

Lake was slightly irritated.

" Set your mind at rest on that," he answered. " We can't very well, unless he puts up a fight." He found himself in the droll position of feeling a touch of pique against the little woman for whose sake he would fain see the fellow dead.

" It doesn't seem right," she said, shaking her head. " All of you against one."

" Well, for the Land's sake ! " cried her aunt. " That's the only way to catch him."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

But the sheriff was hailing outside, and the two men departed. Mamie thought that Archer's manner was of one offended, and she was plunged into depression on the instant. She simply sat staring before her after they had gone. Mrs. Lake was at the door, but she remained within, then rose and began to clear away the breakfast dishes, carried them into the scullery, looked out of the window there and saw, on the ridge above the house, heads and shoulders bob up, saddles, horses; then horses, saddles, men disappeared.

It seemed long hours of ~~time~~ that followed as she went ~~about~~ her duties. Lunch-time arrived, but the men did not return. She was worried about Archer; also she hoped that he was not offended with her. Her ears were alert for the sound of distant rifle-crack, for even if one was miles in the mountains there, shooting, the report could be heard down here with long, rasping echoes; but there was no sound at all except, later on, the faintly booming whistle of the afternoon train, whistling for curves, and presently

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

the shrill scream of flange on rail as it came round the bend on the mountain opposite, like a quaint little train on the Alps of a Nuremburg toy.

Mamie paused in her work to watch it coming along there, and then a movement caught her eye on the far slope, so that she broke out with an involuntary ejaculation of: "Say!" which brought her aunt to her side. Mrs. Lake looked, and said: "Well, whatever are they doing over there?" From the high side of one of the spurs of rock across the creek they could see a little group of men and horses. Both puckered their eyes.

"Why, they've dismounted!"

They peered more keenly.

"Can you make that out?" asked Mrs. Lake.

"There seem to be just two men with all the horses there," said Mamie.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Lake, for suddenly, at hand, down valley, she had seen a man squirming and crawling upwards.

"Is that him?"

"Why, no—that's Mr. Fox."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

The train was rolling up the grade, looking very tiny from here, climbing upwards, with the sun pouring down on it, flashing from the windows, lighting up the wheels on this side, making them look very bright in contrast with the dark, lower semi-circles of the farther wheels seen thus from below. And then the train stopped, though it had not been flagged, stopped well beyond that little shelf where there was not so much as a tool-house, nothing but a board, with the words thereon: "Flag stop for Skookum Creek." They could just make out the dot of the conductor and brakeman walking along the track. Other dots rose up and met them, and suddenly seemed to grow excited, running this way and that. Presently the train moved on, some of the dots drifted into it, grouped on the step.

"Why, whatever's that?" said Mrs. Lake.

On this side of the boulder where the horses had evidently been held, men were mounting, riding down creek. But Mamie's eyes were abruptly drawn to the creek itself. Something rolled in it, flopped over

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

a fall. It was not a log ; it whirled and bumped over. The two women could see men on foot scrambling down to the water's edge, men on horseback drawing near there ; the horses, accustomed, goat-like, to these slopes, now loping, anon suddenly stopping, slithering, loping again. The thing below the fall spun round and round, was carried bobbing across the shallow linn, went aground. Men on horseback and men on foot came down the other bank, and paused.

Mamie found she had been holding her breath. She was cold round her mouth again, with the same kind of coldness she had felt last night when propped up on her pillows in bed. Despite all the blaze of sun, an enveloping and clutching melancholy fell upon her. The far-off booming whistle of the locomotive topping the pass for Saghalie, echoing and echoing, from high and cold mountain cranny to mountain cranny, did not seem at all wonderful now with sense of vastness, seemed unutterably dismal.

" Well, that's him, all right, I guess, however he got there," remarked Mrs. Lake.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Some of the men remained. Others urged their horses across the creek, and came negotiating and twisting uphill, Archer and Lake among them. Mamie recognised Mr. Gregory and Mr. Fox; they turned aside, riding home—also the new teamster, whose name she did not know, in a hurry to take up his day's routine, the excitement over. Cyrus and her uncle rode directly up to the house. Her eyes searched their faces.

"Well, nobody shot him," snapped Lake in response, grimly, but as if with a return of his pique on seeing her again. "It was James all right," he added.

He dismounted; Archer remained aloft in the saddle.

"Where was he?" asked Mrs. Lake. "How did it happen?"

"Oh, we tracked him right up on to the second spur there, this side, where he stopped last night. Lame Knee made out that he had lain there till sun-up."

Startled, Mamie broke in: "He might have shot you then, Mr. Archer, when you were riding over to the Reserve!"

## THE THING IN THE CREEK

"That's so," promptly agreed Lake, in tones as of annoyance. "But surely he wouldn't have been so cowardly," and he gave her a grim smile.

"I didn't say it was cowardly of so many men after one. I didn't mean that!" she cried.

"Well, he lay there anyhow, a spell, maybe till he could hatch a scheme. His notion evidently, when his plan to plug Archer miscarried, was to get across the creek and lie up there till the train came through. I expect he thought he could jump her on the grade up there, and ride the blind baggage, or hang on a rod over the pass. He might have done it too; they don't worry about any one stealing a ride on a jerk-water branch-line like this—don't even watch. Lame Knee spotted him, so we dismounted and fanned out. It was a good scheme of his—to go farther on that way, instead of turning back and getting out the way he came in. Somebody showed up below him, I suppose, even though we did dismount so as to get close and corral him before he would even know we were

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

on to him. He started off again, got skeery, crept along there," he pointed. "Just over there, on that steep bit, he lost hold —spread-eagled right down."

The click of pony-hoofs and flurr of harness-leather attracted their attention and, turning, they saw Punchy Jones and the taciturn-faced Lame Knee riding up. Punchy swept off his hat.

"I guess this is where what they call that there rough justice comes in," he said. "He got the end that pretty nearly came to you, Tomatoes."

He was grimly joyful about it. Mamie's eyes at that, roved to Archer, who was not looking at her but at the teaming boss.

"That would have been terrible," she thought, sick at heart.

## CHAPTER X

### MAMIE CONSIDERS THE STARS

MAMIE indeed was, as Archer had realised—nay, more than realised—a sensitive little soul. This first grimness in life had touched her deeply in many ways. She had often felt, before, as if the mountains looked down upon her friendly; now there were moments, pondering that tragedy of spleen and jealousy, when she glanced up at them and thought they looked almost sinister. And yet again, as a cloud passed over, and the sunlight chased its shadow, the touch of sordid that that teamster had brought to the place—with his malicious brooding and “tanglefoot”—seemed not to bulk so big after all. There were lots of good men for one like that. But it was a pity he had been like that.

She knew that Lake had been piqued over

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

her wish to save the man, and she wanted—next day—when the battered remains were buried, to explain herself to her uncle, to say : " I know he was wrong, and a bad lot. Oh, I know indeed there wasn't even a touch of fineness about his badness, the way there may be with some bad men ; and yet it all seems such a pity." But to say that to him would, she knew, hardly get them any " forrader." His contention would remain, that the man had attempted to murder in a very cowardly fashion, and was a menace to his fellows. She knew he had come nigh killing her, that he might have killed Archer (which was a terrible thought), and yet, on seeing them all grimly preparing, grimly and thoroughly, to hunt for him—well, she couldn't explain it—but she had felt pity for him. She wished she could explain to her uncle, who had been so clearly upset by her plea for leniency.

Looking back on it all she was sure that she had vexed Archer too. She remembered how he went out of the door that time, as though just a little hurt at what appeared to be lack of appreciation over their deter-

## MAMIE CONSIDERS THE STARS

mination to track down the man who had so nearly been her murderer. Some women, right or wrong, would have paid no attention to Cyrus until he came back in a different frame of mind, but she knew he would not stay away from the Lake household for pique, and she had no desire at all to have anybody what you might call under her heel.

She wished she could explain herself to Archer. She puzzled out a form of words that would show him what had been in her heart. It might be silly; it might be illogical, but if she could only explain it she thought he would understand. The complexity of her thoughts increasing, she realised the need of wider vocabulary. Mrs. Lake had only two verbs—*to get*, and *to fix*. She wished her uncle would speak to her the way she had heard him speaking to Archer.

Hand on breast, she meditated upon it all—there was so much in here that she would like to express, to say, and she had not the words. Archer did not come in to supper. He had been out before sunrise, to make

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

up for a lost day, putting in extra work on the hauling. Besides, Punchy Jones was away again to Skookum City to make more inquiries about that business he wanted to buy. He had come back to Skookum Creek in the midst of his inquiries, all for her sake, thought Mamie. It was surely sweet of every one to be so upset ; she did hope that they knew she was grateful.

Mrs. Lake dozed by the open door ; Lake was pottering in the harness shed. She could hear the jolt and occasional jar of a wheel, as Archer came down hill with his last load. She knew it would not be dumped to-night ; he would leave it in the wagon, stable the horses. Mrs. Lake came awake at the sound.

"Have you saved any supper for Mr. Archer ?" Mamie asked.

"No, he told me yesterday that he would eat up at the Jessie Debrett, working an extra long day."

"Still he's liable to want something after driving down."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Lake. "He ain't no baby to feed every two hours."

## MAMIE CONSIDERS THE STARS

So Mamie, who never knew quite where she was in this world of so many diverse views, settled down to one of the books that Lake had got for her—not one of the essay-books, but one of the story books. It ~~was~~ about a grim old Scottish judge, and his dependents. She had read a little way, but the interjection of the sordid in her life had caused her to lay it aside these last two or three days. She took it up now where she had left off. The music of the words she enjoyed. "I like the way it is written," she might have expressed it, had she not heard Archer and her uncle speak of a writer who "could handle words."

At first she had found difficulty in making out what the characters said, for they spoke in the Scots dialect, but she had soon grown accustomed to that, and it was now with perfect understanding that she read. And a curious kind of blank strained look came on her face as, in the chapter telling of a man-hunt over the rolling border moors of Scotland, she came upon this :

"'For the boady of the saxt,' pursued Kirstie, 'wi' his head smashed like a hazel-

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

nit, had been a' that nicht in the chairge o' Hermiston Water, and it dunting it on the stanes, and grunding it on the shallows, and flinging the deid thing heels-ower-hurdie at the Fa's o' Spango ; and in the first o' the day, Tweed had got a hold o' him and carried him off like a wind, for it was uncoly swalled, and raced wi' him, bobbing under brae-sides, and was long playing with the creature in the drumlie linns under the castle, and at the hinder end of all cuist him up on the starling of Crossmichael brig.' "

She could read no more, put the book down, and listened to the eternal whimple and chug of Skookum Creek. She wanted some one to talk to. She had learned affection for her aunt, but her aunt would merely have been baulked by such talk as she wished to have now. Rising, she went to the door, looked at the streak of light coming out of the harness shed. It was the way of Lake all over, that man of fits and starts, was typical of him that, in the evening, when other normal men would be tilting their chairs on the verandahs, heels on the rail, he should be hard at work. Came to

## MAMIE CONSIDERS THE STARS

the girl, standing there at the door, an impulse to, as it were, throw herself at him—her own real self—say to him: "Uncle, I'm lonesome. You've been very good to me, giving me these books, but talk to me too—talk to me the way you talk to Archer. I mightn't understand some of the words, but I could catch hold" (she had learnt from hearing Cyrus that it was "hold," not "holt") "of what you were getting at."

Yet she was shy about throwing this real self, growing so quickly now, at him. Instead of appealing thus to Lake she looked up at the mountains and the stars, as if appealing to them. There was no wind here on the lower slopes, but from above dropped down to the valley, thin and ghostly, a kind of rumour of the stirring of the treetops up there in the timber belt. It was as if they caught the ground swell of a deep and vasty ocean of air; the twinkling of the stars might have been caused by its surface ripple. She was deeply aware of the mysterious majestic tranquillity of night. Although she had never

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

heard of Blanco White's sonnet, she would have understood it then.

The great dipper was tilted in the sky ; to discover the pole star one had no need to find the pointers ; the Pleiades were no mere haze. Her gaze solemnly roved over that dark blue immensity with all its fixed and twinkling worlds. And then, over there, up from the one or two lights of Skookum Creek—a star might have fallen to earth and stayed—the lamp was lit in Archer's shack. That form of words she had evolved to say to him she again conned over, and moved a few steps away from the house. Next moment she turned back, passed to her own bedroom, and lighting the lamp there took down the pile of hair.

Archer did not like that way of doing it ; she was certain of it. And so she just gathered it into a great coil that she pinned low, devoid of whirligigs. She was pleased with the result, and after feeling it to make sure that it was firm, went out into the night again. Suddenly she felt just a little touch of fear. Silly ! That was surely silly ! The man who shot at her—and

## MAMIE CONSIDERS THE STARS

even that by accident—the other night on that path, had gone away into the Mystery, the deeper mystery of Death that hangs round the mystery of Life. Something rushed upon her from a bush.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You did give me a scare!"

It was just the Lake cat, the solitary Robinson Crusoe cat of Skookum Creek. That decided her. If she was to be rattled because the cat merely played a rollicking, feline peep-bo with her, then it was time for her, with effort of will, to dismiss all childish terrors.

And ten minutes later Archer started, and thrust a letter into his pocket as a voice outside inquired:

"May I come in, Mr. Archer?"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

As a matter of fact she was aware of the secreting of something. There was no need to secrete from her. She had a great affection for this man. She was fond of Uncle Leslie ; she was fond of her aunt ; she liked Punchy Jones ; she liked Mr. Ellis—she liked a heap of people ; but she was tremendously fond of Cyrus Archer. That it could be love, of course, in the sense of that love which leads to marriage, she knew to be out of the question, for he had a fiancée, and she and all her set would be very clever, Mamie was sure, different from her.

Yet she quite well realised that she was tremendously fond of him. There were times, because of the bigness of this affection, when she felt critical regarding herself,

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

and wondered if she were really properly grateful to her uncle and aunt for all their goodness to her and care for her. And in case it might hurt them she would not let them see just how much Archer meant to her. That, at least, was her intention. She thought Cyrus looked worried this evening, and wished he might make a real friend of her, for even she (though she was not clever, she told herself) might be able to help him. Well, she would put one thing right between them anyhow.

"Mr. Archer," she said.

Her brows puckered in a thoughtful way she had, which well he knew; her beautiful brown eyes solemnly concentrated with that touch of simplicity, naïveté, a kind of grown-up childishness that touched him, woke in him a "taking care" side, a devotion in men very deep, seldom spoken of, something akin with what, perhaps, is meant by "mother-love."

"Mr. Archer," she repeated, "I want to tell you that I did appreciate—I appreciated a whole lot, more than I can tell—the way

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

you and everybody else were angry for my sake about that man. It's awfully nice to know that people like me. Auntie and I, and Mrs. Ellis, and Mrs. Fox, are the only women in Skookum Creek. I know that it being a woman he pulled on by mistake made them all hotter still." Frowning for expression she went on: "I know that even the attempt to murder—why, well, let me see—yes, even if he had mistaken a tall bush for you, made it right to catch him. I can't tell you what a relief it was to me—that's tame, Mr. Archer—that he didn't get you. I was hot against him because of that. But I think it's what you would call—oh, what did I hear you say once?—is it the personal element?"

Cyrus gravely inclined his head, but did not interrupt her with speech.

"And," she continued, "well, I wanted to explain that it was just because I knew, from the way the boys talked, that this personal element of me as a woman got mixed up in it, that I wanted him to have a chance. Do you understand that?" she asked wistfully.

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

"I understand this," he answered, "that you have a dear, good soul."

She shook her head at him as though troubled.

"That's the personal element again," she said, and then her eyes drifting she saw an envelope on his table. As her eyes a moment rested on it, she felt again, as she had felt on entering—a sense of something being hid, and of something being wrong.

"You're worried," she said.

"Won't you sit down?" he suggested, for she had made her declaration about herself standing, he also on his feet the while, hand resting on chair-back. He moved the chair forward now, and drew a stool from under the table. "That wasn't a confession of yours just now," he said. "It was a statement. I want to make a confession to you. When you were looking after me——" Her innocent eyes were wide with wonder as she sat down gazing up at him. "—— I did not mention about you for some time to Miss Armstrong." There was somehow a little clutch at her heart, the way he said it. "It was not until after, Miss Lake——"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Miss Lake! And he had called her Mamie, quite naturally, as if without knowing he had done so, often—if not often enough; it sounded different, as he said it. She wished he would call her Mamie always; only a shyness she could not explain prevented her from asking him to. Why, even Punchy—who was casual in her life—called her Miss Mamie, with the prefix certainly, but not Miss Lake. She gazed at him with those candid wondering eyes, as he paused as if puzzled for words.

"It wasn't till some time later," he tried again, having hesitated after the first rapid attempt, "that I mentioned you to her. I—er—" he looked at the floor, then raised his eyes, "I quite liked you by then," he said, as though that were nothing at all. It would have been a patronising insolence in many another case; in this it was but reserve, restraint. "I wonder if you can understand," he asked, he now desiring her understanding, "that I felt it was up to me to—well, mention you then."

She had no reply to that. Something happened in her breast.

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

"And I wonder if you can understand," he went on, taking it for granted that her silence meant she understood so far, "I wonder if you can understand why I wrote about you, mentioning you as if you were quaint. I——" he looked harassedly ashamed, "I called you a homely little thing."

She laughed the laugh as of one relieved.

"And is that what's worrying you?" she broke out. "Why, I guess I am. I'm sure I am!"

She had noticed, in the detail matter of speech, that "guessing" and "reckoning" seemed abolished in those chats—those too few chats and discussions between Lazy Lake and Archer—at which it had been a kind of red-letter pleasure for her to be present.

"Besides, you got that from my aunt," she added.

"But it's not true," he said.

"Isn't it?" she asked.

She had been brought up in the belief that it was; it had been Mrs. Lake's policy so to raise her, in an extreme swing away from that vanity which leads to the use of the powder-puff and rouge-pot with a shyness

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

toward water. Mamie could not—no child now—fail to realise the sincerity of the admiration in his eyes. What she wanted to say, what was in her heart, was : " So long as you think so, that would be enough for me." But such a speech could be only for his fiancée. It did not strike her (more critical of herself than of others) that his speech, which almost called forth that intimate response from her, was of a kind that should perhaps not be made by a man save to his future wife.

" I felt I had to tell you," he said. " It is a funny feeling—I wanted to give you a square deal, even though you knew nothing about it."

" Well, Mr. Archer," she cried, " you told me just now I had a good soul. I feel like saying the same to you."

" You forgive me ? " he asked.

" There ain't—there's nothing to forgive. I've only got to thank you for being so white with me, even in behind, where I couldn't see whether you were white or not."

He sat down on the stool at last. So far

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

he had been standing, occasionally pacing a step or two.

"I've been punished for writing that," he said.

"You've taken on about it far too much, Mr. Archer," she replied, trying to make it seem nothing at all in her voice, suddenly afraid of growing too fond of him, with this fiancée of his in the background. Restrained hitherto in her development, and the restraint now removed, she—the veritable, inner She—grew and expanded daily; nay, in this talk, one might have said momentarily.

"It's not exactly that," he acknowledged, "but she's asked after you in each of her letters with those awful words: 'How's the homely little thing?'"

She was annoyed with Dulcie Armstrong, but seeing that she existed, Mamie tried to alleviate for Archer the other girl's stings, and with this good intention, even while irritated, she said: "Oh, well, it's natural to a woman to be jealous. Perhaps that's what it is. I wouldn't worry."

"It's not jealousy!" he contradicted definitely.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"I expect it is. Anyway, I wouldn't worry. Quite natural! And if she saw me that would soon cure her!"

Archer opened his eyes wide. This statement of her belief was simple and sincere. But he took up another point.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "she's annoyed with me."

"Whatever for?"

"She thinks I should be settling."

"But you don't want ever to settle—I mean in your mind. You want to keep moving. Haven't you told her of this scheme of yours to stay on around here for a year or two, now that you've got so friendly over at the Reserve, and get more material for your book?"

"Oh, she's not interested in that," he said, in an off-hand way.

Mamie opened her mouth to speak. She wanted to say: "Then she can't love you, or she would be interested!" but no one, above all a woman, could thus make as though to sweep away a whole love-story. And yet somebody should say it to him. She was so sure that what she felt was

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

right. There was, however, so long a pause that she made a tentative attempt to say it, horrified at thought of this unknown, uninterested woman who was going to marry him! Or a suggestion at least, she made, which was an oblique way of serving him with the opinion.

"Are you quite sure?" she asked. "I can hardly believe she's not interested when it means so much to you! People don't always say what they feel. Look at Mrs. Lake—my aunt. The morning after my scare she said to me: 'You ain't so homely after all. Guess you're growing up now, and there's no harm in telling you.'"

She spoke this last, regarding herself, for speaking's sake, afraid that she might have said too much in what immediately preceded—and trying to cover it up! Archer put hand in his breast-pocket, drew forth a letter, held it over the lamp. The edge curled, blackened, smouldered, blazed. He dropped it into the stove, while Mamie watched, as if at the killing of something. She almost exclaimed: "Oh, please don't!"

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"That letter," he said quietly, "was chucking me over."

"Chucking—you—over! Why?"

"Because I told her in my last letter that I was quite determined to stay here until I could gather all the data that is lying about. I took great pains to explain it all, how I am getting to know the Indians, and am looking forward to winter, when the hauling will stop, to move about with Lame Knee among some of the other bands, and how I could not see my way to going back East into the firm." He stopped abruptly. "So she chucked me, finally."

There was a new development in Mamie at that. To her, looking directly at him, there came what a little ago he had felt toward her: the protective instinct. She thought, nevertheless, that it was good for him to be thus thrown over; it was the kindly little sentimentalist in her that made her consider that he was hurt. She was not really, with her view of the case, sorry for him in his life, sorry for him that there had come this end of the affair. How could she be, who only a few moments ago

## THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

had been appalled to think he was going to marry one who cared nothing for his deep interests? She had felt so sure it was all wrong—that engagement—that now she was gloriously relieved for him.

"You must try to cheer up," she advised. "I'm awfully sorry for you, Mr. Archer," which was quite true in its way.

He gave her a long look.

"Mamie," he said.

Her eyes met his, waiting.

"What?" she asked at length.

"I'm going to stay here a long time," he answered, his expression suddenly changing.

It was like the end to another chapter. He seemed to shake off something. She was aware of a sense of constraint, and friendly and frank, away at the other pole from all designing folk, she tried to relieve the constraint with another theme; and the first theme that occurred was the puzzling one of her coiffing.

"Do you like the way I have my hair fixed to-night?" she asked.

"I do," he replied. "I noticed it at once. It looks beautiful. It wasn't you

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

piled it up and puffed it out the other way!"

"I'm glad you like it," she said, and dropped back again, as through use and wont, into the old relation toward him, after these intimate passages on which it was as though a curtain had now fallen, perhaps wanting still a little to make up for that pique which she was sure she had given to him as well as to her uncle. "I would like to please you," she added shyly.

He was clearly startled.

"But you ought to please yourself," he said, not looking at her.

"I don't know. You've taught me a lot," she answered.

He did not say "I?" this time, for indeed he did not deny to himself that he had taught her—a little—with intent.

"I'd better be getting back," she commented. "Aunt was asleep when I came across, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if she'd be akeery after that affair."

"Then I'll stroll down with you," said Archer, and lowering the lamp he followed her out into the night.

## CHAPTER XII

### HUMAN INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

AND now came what one of open mind must perforce consider as possible evidence against Lake's theory that these interests other than, as it were, food—and drink—and work for daily bread—and the merely animal relaxations from work—that these Other Things were not to be talked of "in the market-place." To be sure, the conversation of the handful of inhabitants here was very much of things thereabouts, and idle gossip—such as that Funchy Jones knew what he was doing in arranging to take over that contracting business in Skookum City, that his hauling contract would expire here with the snows when the mine would "lay off," that in the spring a bucket tramway was to be built from the mine to Summit, making an end of wagoning or raw-hiding

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

even. It was true that they could figure out, like amateur financiers, the cost of the erection of that tramway, make a hazard at the terms of Punchy's contract, and, sitting back, hands in belts, blowing smoke, arrive at some agreement as to how soon the tramway would pay itself.

It is true also that they could speculate among each other on the dollar possibilities of the pocket for raising vegetables to supply the growing towns below, and privately speculate upon their own schemes that were not for such public airing lest another man got ahead of them. It is true that their seriousness was much over the dollar, their joviality over such stories as "w somebody "got a jag on" and fell in the creek, a former resident of the town of Johnstown, back East, and how at the cold splash that brought him to himself partially he sang out: "Ho fellers—the dam's burst!"

But their attitude to the work that kept Tomato Archer in their midst, after the shutting down of the Jessie Debrett in the Fall, a little shook Lake in his view of "keeping your thumb" on matters that interested

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

you if they did not seem immediately, on the face of it, either glaringly useful or screamingly funny. It leaked out. Archer, be-like, took Mamie's advice, expressed long ago, neither to shout it from the housetops nor to hide it under a bushel. The coming and going of Lame Knee, his sleeping overnight now and then in the Tomato Shack, Archer's departures with him—not after deer, but on visits to the Reserve—told them, without any rubber-necking, or butting-in, or curious interrogation, that there was a job on.

They couldn't put a name on it. They bore in mind that the Indians along there hunted game, and might still have a few furs to trade; made knick-knacks, too, for the curio market — beaded moccasins, necklaces, and the like. Perhaps this man who had made a side-line of tomatoes was going to hold himself up through the winter, without touching his summer's capital, by acting as middleman between the Indians and the curio-stores. Somebody suggested that, in a drawling way, as if not too desperately interested in another man's business.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"I guess not," said old Mr. Ellis. "They don't do enough in that line up along there. Why, even the baskets of Indian make they have themselves they trade from other tribes. I see them picking berries, last time I was through the hills, into an ordinary store basket."

"Still," remarked Lake, who was present, up popping that side of him that liked to puzzle on such occasions, "that doesn't mean they've forgotten how to make these things. He may be going to start up a basket factory business with them."

Lake was looked upon as something of a familiar with Archer, and the man who tried to pretend he wasn't curious gave him a quick look to see if he knew, or was only hazarding an opinion, or was at his old non-committal game of playing with different possibilities. He suspected, that drifting scrutiny over, that Lake did not know, was trying to appear as if he knew more than he did; but Lake, as ever, was a dark horse.

"Oh, maybe," the inquisitive one replied. "But any of their own baskets I see don't

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

look a patch on the baskets you could get from a Yumatilla." And the see-saw talk then turned into a controversy between the speaker and old Ellis, who had traded with pack-horse teams all through the mountains, from the Shuswaps on Shuswap Lake to the North and South Kootenais, Flat Heads, and Pend Oreilles.

No, Lake did not think they would be interested, but they were, when he dropped in their midst a pamphlet bearing the heading : "British Association for the Advancement of Ethnological Knowledge, London Report, 19—," and they found one portion of it headed : "Shamanism and Witchcraft among the Columbian River Tribes, contributed by Cyrus Archer, M.B.S.E." They puzzled out the "tail" to his name, and read at the end of the pamphlet that he had been elected a Member of the Society on the strength of this and, they gathered from the appendix, former contributions. The appendix was dryly written from their point of view, as if by somebody who could not ever be enthusiastic, at least outwardly, and yet withal he

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

had to use the phrase, regarding their Tomato Archer: ". . . his very thorough research . . ." Still sceptical, Lake was not beaten.

"It's the dog of the thing that tickles them," he thought to himself. "If a man half around the world, whose name they don't know, hadn't spoken of his 'very thorough research,' he might just as well be peddling whisky to the Indians up there for all they care."

He even assured himself, chuckling inwardly, that part of their interest was due to the view that Cyrus Archer had told a British Society something it didn't know. He realised the weakness of his people for, with a pleasant sense of being broad-minded, swapping stories to the effect of: "All Englishmen, of course, ain't unable to move. There was an Englishman came to work once on a job I was at, and he said: 'I'm willing to learn.' Now that was a good Englishman." When he had heard that actual little anecdote, Lake had answered: "Yes, that's the proper, humble spirit toward us that we can appreciate," and he had

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

been vindicated to himself in his smiling cynicism towards humanity when the speaker perceived neither josh nor irony, but, very friendly, agreed : " Yes, sir, that's what ! "

In Archer's prolonged absences (I've told you how Lake was apt to make habits) he came to talk more to Mamie, as though inside her head there really was a spirit, imagination, brain. He had to communicate to her his dropping of the pamphlet in their midst, and his view of their attitude toward it. If she had failed to see what he meant, if she had merely in round terms disagreed, pushed aside his opinion of them, he would most probably have frozen up and thought her one more who didn't understand, disappointed. But she did not. She smiled over his slightly aloof half-smiling cynicism, and suggested not that he was wrong, but that perhaps there were other sides also.

Once a child grows up there is not so very great difference between the two generations. Eleven is an infant to twenty-one ; twenty-one and thirty-one have much in common ; twenty-one, thirty-one, and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

forty-one can sit and discuss, each filliping the other. Mamie, in the event, seemed to be right ; for one night, shortly after his return from a prolonged visit to the Reserve, Cyrus joined those who had already sat down to the winter's card-playing and checkers. When some one remarked : " Your eyes look strained," he said : " Yes, been writing too much."

Somebody else at that, attention distracted from the paste-boards, played an eight-spot instead of a ten by accident, and the game fizzled out. Archer was in talking mood. He was wanting to tell of his good fortune. Lame Knee had informed him that the Keeper of the Winter Counts liked him and might, maybe, before long, consider him worthy to have the sacred bag opened and the pictured histories of his people expounded by that poor old wizened and rheumy-eyed Aaron of the tribe. Lake observed that no one asked if he was getting paid for the stuff he was writing about " them Siwashes." Indeed, he observed that no one, on this occasion, referred to the Indians as " them Siwashes." Archer talked

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

in the way a man will talk sometimes when he is full of a subject ; and they were interested. Nobody asked : " Well, what does it matter anyhow ? " Old Ellis was unexpectedly paternal ; with his head perked up he displayed to the onlooking Lake a niche of himself that Lake had never known.

" So that's what you are after, my boy," he said. " Now, if you want to get next to the Okanagans after you're through here, I can give you an introduction."

His eyes wavered a moment to Fox who didn't know much about it, and who smiled at the suggestion of introduction.

" That's right," he declared. " That's right. It all depends on how you blow in on a bunch of Indians what you get out of them. They've got more different layers of society than a married man's town on the main line. If you blow in and hob-nob with one of the nobodies, hail-fellow-well-met, it'll take an awful lot of influence to get the chief to open up to you—yes, sir, even supposing he's the kind of chief that'll let you photograph him for two bits."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

They smiled at the simile, or what you may call it, but accepted his information.

"Don't you forget," said Ellis, teasing out his beard. "I can give you an introduction there."

Archer, with grave nod, murmured his thanks.

"Well, it's all right interesting," said one of the group, "knowing how other folks live, and think, and delving out the meaning of things they do, even supposing a lot of the specimens you see look as if they was shy on ablutions."

Lake had to admit to himself that there was no more suggestion in Skookum Creek that Cyrus Archer was frittering away his life than there is in Boston that Parkman and Bancroft might have tried to do something useful with their lives. To Mamie he also made announcement of the reception of Archer's disclosures to the inhabitants regarding his employment with an air of: "It's up to me to tell you, seeing we discussed the subject of how they'd look upon it." And to Lake's satisfaction (for, though he had held a theory, he had no axe to

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

grind, and could see his theory totter without the faintest vinegary annoyance) they even, later on, asked Archer if he had contributed any more of these papers to this or that society. Cyrus acknowledged that he had; and as the papers came along he handed them forth for perusal.

" You'll have a fair jag of them before you're through," remarked Fox, " but they're some scattered. Why don't you round 'em up ? "

There was just a twitch at the corners of Archer's mouth. He, who had been complimented on the crystal style of his papers, was writing one (a side-issue) upon " The Vivacity of Slang," with reference to the drifting into the currency of words and phrases used in different callings; and he must remember that remark. He told them that he intended to collect the articles; casually commented, as if amid a bevy of publishers, that he couldn't think of a title for the " round-up "; and they all, with immediate eagerness, began to put their brains in soak. Fox suggested " The Folk whose Claim we Jumped." Ellis had enough of the savvy

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

to smile under his beard; you could tell by the twinkle of his eyes that he was amused.

"Too lengthy, I guess," he said.

"Red Men of the Mountains" was another suggestion.

"No sir," said Ellis, "too florid. The stage-coach is rescued by the troopers, warned by the girl-cowboy, at the end of that there narrative. He wants something more sedate."

And if they did not evolve a title they were all certainly interested enough to get cohesion. The theme gathered them together more satisfactorily than discussions on the pros and cons of wet and dry farming, or the merits and demerits of rival platering inventions. That night Lake was openly humanised, carried Archer home to supper, and had to recount all the talk to wide-eyed Mamie, her hair, as his wife had it, "fixed" now to her own liking.

"It looks kind of simple," Mrs. Lake had said, when asked for her opinion.

"That's just what Mr. Archer said,"

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

Mamie had replied. "He said that was what he liked about it."

"Oh well, of course, Cy Archer—he's liable to know," and that was all. Mrs. Lake had the impression that Cyrus came from the élite. She had also, by the way, a suspicion that he was looked upon as something of a black sheep by his folks at home, though why she so surmised, and why they should so consider him, she could not say. But it didn't cut any ice to her, as she would have remarked. What she thus surmised, in her intuitive way, Lake discovered—but that is not the way to tell it.

It befell thus: The agent at the Reserve had to know what Cyrus was pottering about there for. He had a terrorising and autocratic manner to strangers, dark as an Indian, grim, with piercing eyes. Cyrus had nothing to hide, and one day when the snows were beginning to drift lower on the peaks, Agent Stewart came over in person with the returning Archer, just for a change as he put it, but it was really so as to have a long chat with the young man in his own place. Stewart was an interesting person.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

His story sounds like fiction. An Oxford University man, of Scottish extraction, he had come West in Canada before the C.P.R. was built, in the days of the buffalo, and when MacLeod was a veritable fort. He had drifted up and down the plains, came into the Rockies by the Crow's Nest Pass, and never went out of them again. He married an Indian girl, though no mere squaw-man, mark you, and wrote home a little before the day arranged for the ceremony to announce his intention to his people. By return of post he received a letter informing him that if he did marry her he would be cut off with a shilling—that shilling which according to the law prevents any possibility of contesting a will. He simply wrote, on half a sheet of notepaper, "Go to Hell!" and then putting his pipe in his mouth gave the half-sheet of paper a twist, stuck it in the stove, used it for a pipe-lighter, and there was the end of it. But all the rest (as writers say), as Kipling says, is another story. It was another case of "Thy people shall be my people," or maybe it was the glaciated peaks as well,

## INTEREST IN SKOOKUM CREEK

the winter snows, the moonlit icicles, the brawling spring freshets, the wavering blue haze of summer, the glory and glamour of the Fall. It was as if this scion of blue blood had merely come home. But we have already said that is another story. Few knew it. He was just an old-timer.

To be sure, he had moods ; most have ; but in his average moods he found Archer interesting, and in none did he wish to fire him off the Reserve. He was really attached to his wards—not exploiting them. Cyrus was just a shade dubious about introducing him to Lazy Lake. There was a side of both men so much alike that he thought (paradoxically or not, just as you see it) that they might not pull. He broached the doubt to Mamie when he first had the thought of inviting Stewart back with him ; and she assured him that at any rate her uncle would be interested in the old-timer.

"I think they'll pull all right," she said ; and Cyrus, looking at her, felt that she would make impossible by her presence any too painfully untoward hostility of the kind that sometimes rises up between men

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

when it is rather in their crankiness than in their sanity that they are alike.

And now as I have another supper-party to tell you of, it may as well have a chapter to itself.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

MRS. LAKE, as we know, was not blind to the fact that Archer had much to do with the blossoming of Mamie, and she nurtured the thought that he was not merely philanthropic in his attitude toward the girl. She surmised that he was, as she might say, at least a little bit struck on her; and in the way that women have the knack of, when talking of him one day to her niece, it was not what she said but a look that she gave which made Mamie shake her head.

"Oh no, you're quite wrong," said the homely little thing. "There's nothing of that kind," a denial of a glance which Mrs. Lake took to mean—well just what you would take it to mean, whether you were man or woman.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

But Mamie's next remark left her again less guessing than in the mood of: "Well, he likes you very much, anyhow." For, Mamie's remark had been: "Why, he's got a fiancée back East!" To Mamie, of course, every word of that night on which she saw the back-East fiancée go up in smoke (that befell after this conversation with her aunt, so there had been entire sincerity in Mamie's tone dismissing Mrs. Lake's so vocal glance), every word of it was sacred to the full. If Mrs. Lake had told any one thereafter that Archer had a girl back East, Mamie would never have offered enlightenment, not so much because she preferred that her aunt should still think he was betrothed, as because her knowledge to give such a negative had been gained on that, to her, very sacred occasion. Still Mrs. Lake felt it was "up to her" to make such return as she could to Archer for all that he had done.

"I can't do much except in the way of handling a rolling-pin," she mused to herself; and so, hearing that he was bringing over Agent Stewart to stay with him

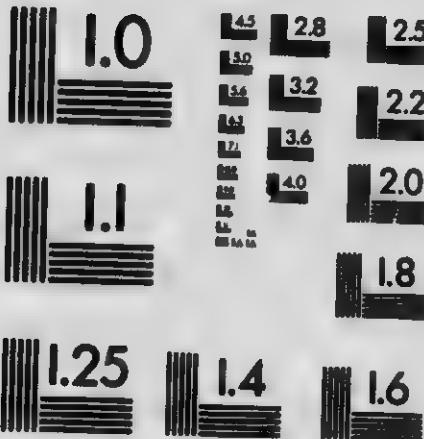
## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

for a day or two, she got busy in those ways that she could get busy.

She had never spoken to Stewart, had seen him only in the distance when trekking in here through the mountain passes. Amazing though it may seem to those affluent Western ranchers who live in town and spin out to the ranch on their automobile to be present at the round-up, or to cast an eye to the fruit-packing, as the case may be, or to use it as a rest-house when going a-fishing, she had but twice in all her life been on a train, and that might be called only once, for it was merely going to Saghalie and coming back out of curiosity to see the valley beyond. And yet, perhaps, I should say "amazing though it may seem to Easterners," instead of "amazing though it may seem to Westerners," for even the Westerner who propels himself everywhere by gasoline (who knows his way about in the hotels of New York, and can give you pointers on what berths to book on the trans-Atlantic palaces, and where to get Virginia tobacco in Paris) must know many of the type of Mrs. Lake who, when moving,



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## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

still go by wagon-roads and trails in prairie schooners. The middle-West knows them well.

If you are reading this in observation car between Moose Jaw and Calgary, or between Medicine Hat and Creston, or between Bismarck and the Marias River, or while rolling through Nebraska and Wyoming, and travel has come to mean to you "Luncheon is now ready in the dining-car, ten cars ahead," lift your eyes—and you may see them. They trek thus still, as far as from Kansas to the Peace River, with the tented wagon. The good lady is inside, in sun-bonnet; the adventurer (worthy descendant of those who crawled from Ohio to the Golden Gate) and his young hopeful are herding along the live stock. It is better every way than moving by rail, and as for the difference in time spent, forget the word "hustle" and the phrase "shake a leg"; and think of the junctions, and changes on the railroads, from one system to another, of the possible breakages, the freight rates, the fretting failure to secure a sleeping berth booked in

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

advance too !) through some hitch in the linking-up ; and ponder upon the closeness of an upper berth, obtained at last after protest—then put your head out and smell the sage (even through the locomotive smoke), drink the wind ; and give them, the slow trekers, a passing wave of regret rather than of irony. It was when " coming in " thus (for that is the phrase in these mountain pockets) that Mrs. Lake had seen Stewart, and from her glimpse, and what legends she had heard of him (even apart from her friendliness toward his friend Archer), she would have felt it her duty, as the most elderly of the three women of Skookum Creek, to provide him with pie. Your old-timer need not have a very sweet tooth, but he appreciates good pie ; talking with him of places beyond the main-line, beyond the spur lines, dropping names of mountains, creeks, and meadows, coming to the inhabitants and chatting of their doings, their skill in the saddle, or with a rifle, it is almost inevitable that sooner or later comes out the phrase : " Do you know So-and-so ? I stopped over with

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

him going through. His wife is sure an artist in pies."

Archer had left word that while Stewart was with him he would "batch" again at the shack, for they would probably be out in the hills all day and would only inconvenience Mrs. Lake with erratic meal-hours. She merely nodded, but her mind was made up nevertheless. She would give them pies, if nothing more. Mamie, seeing what her aunt was about on the evening when the men were expected, had an inspiration.

"What's the matter," she asked, "with me going across and setting supper, having everything ready for them when they come in?"

Mrs. Lake saw nothing the matter with it. The trouble was about the hot victuals that she had determined to prepare; it was impossible to tell what time they would arrive. Still, there were ways to circumvent that difficulty. The pies and the jams could be put upon the table, on that cloth that Mamie had once used, in a moment of emergency, to flag the train across the

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

valley; and a watch could be kept along the wagon-road into which debouched the trail from the Reserve.

As it happened, the two men were suddenly seen nearer than was expected, for Stewart had guided the young ethnologist (M.B.E.S., you remember) aside from the trail, back there, to show him the place where Old Man had stuck a stone on end ages and ages ago, according to the Indian myth. Had the Jessie Debrett still been working, the puff of steam from her shaft pumping-engine could have been seen from the grove that no one here knew aught. The new, transient inhabitants were more interested (Lake was right so far) in what galena could be blasted out of the mountain's ribs, more interested in the rock spangled with silver and with lead, than in this granite slab, so old and so puzzling that the Red Men had to resort to myth about it, and tell of how Old Man (who was half a god, now serious, now humorous) had slept there once in his wandering about the world. And having seen, and speculated over, that stone, they came directly

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

across the bald lower ridge, back to the wagon-road.

"Why, there they be!" cried Mrs. Lake. "You ain't got your eyes skinned!" and she departed to her stove.

Thus it was that when Stewart and his host, having unsaddled, stepped into the tomato shack, stretching their legs, they were greeted by the sheen of the white cloth and dishes. Each was ravenous. Archer offered an unspoken grace before pie, as it were, to Mamie, to whom he gave credit for all this; and when, twenty minutes later, she appeared with a tray on which was food that steamed, she presented to their satisfied gaze a stare of surprise, astonishment—almost disbelief. The pies, the jams, the berries had all disappeared. The solemn drollery on her face was infectious. Stewart rose to his feet and bowed, chuckling with laughter.

"Kids! I tell you what, just kids!" exclaimed Mrs. Lake when that gastronomic jugglery was reported to her, and she sent back a message by her niece to Cyrus that if they were the kind of people to maltreat

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

their innards like that, all same bear cubs when there is honey around, meals must be eaten at her house during Mr. Stewart's stay.

" My aunt says you'll be going home with indigestion if you haven't some one to explain to you that you ought to get a lining of meat, and eat pastry after ! "

So we come to the supper. Archer thought he successfully hid his start of astonishment on entering the Lakes' next evening at the time appointed, but perhaps he did not, for, the presentation of Mr. Stewart over, Mrs. Lake turned to him and remarked :

" You never saw me in my Sunday-go-to-meetings before. Never been out of the drawer since you came here. No call to put them on. Nobody ever been here but that there mining engineer and his wife, and I wouldn't put them on for her to see. Better in a print gown than in something might maybe be out of fashion for all I know. They look new, don't they ? " she asked.

" They do," said Archer.

" You wouldn't think I'd had them years upon years ? Why, they've been in

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

fashion three times since I had them. Every now and again, when I see a picture paper, I see they've come in again. Fashions are nonsense—only going round in a circle. I lay it away in camphor."

There was actually no need to tell them this.

Mr. Stewart liked the woman on the moment. She, the only one of the party that a chief entertainer might have been doubtful of, put them all at ease at once.

You know that delightful blend of meticulous prose and careless slang that Stevenson's letters give? Somewhat thus old-timer Stewart talked, with 'Varsity men behind him, and bad men, college-lecturers, cow-punchers, and dudes and toughs. Archer glanced at Mamie and inwardly extolled her beauty, noted, too, her attire, which was a side-issue even as "ain't" instead of "isn't" had been side-issue not so long ago. And if, in my attempts to portray Mrs. Lake, I have suggested that she was a woman bereft of reticences, then I have failed in my portrayal, and here is opportunity to put the matter right by telling that though she

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

chattered thus at the outset about her raiment (that in the passing of years had been thrice in fashion), she did not ask : " And what do you think of Mamie's rig ? " nor announced : " I told my lazy husband that it was time he gave her a frock worth while, and we've had pattern-books and home measurements according to instructions, and there it is ! " Her own opinion was that it was a little lacking in show, but there—Mamie liked its simplicity ; so did Lazy Lake, and so, evidently, did Archer ; so there you were ! But though she could invite criticism upon her own camphor-kept wardrobe, and announce the naïve compliment to Stewart that her robe of state had been donned for the occasion of his visit to Skoekum Creek, she would make no god-darned side-show of Mamie.

As for Lake, he was slightly aloof at first. He knew part of the story of Agent Stewart, that he had somewhere in the background what are called cultured ancestors ; he remarked, of course, that Stewart's speech showed many brands, was blend of vernacular and scholarly ; but it was obvious to

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

him that Stewart had appraised Mrs. Lake at her true value.

Stewart had a name for taciturnity, yet he was not taciturn here. It seemed as if his visit to Skookum Creek, begun with a boyish devouring of the sweet things, was to be all bonhomous. They must have pulled well, for before long they found themselves talking of their people—this Stewart, too, of whom it was said : " Yes, the agent could put you wise, he could tell you—but I don't know ! He's such a funny man. Never know how he'll jump ! " They may have exaggerated, but another way in which they described the uncertainty of Stewart was : " He may take you in and set the gramophone a-going with hymn-tunes, or he may rest the barrel of his shot-gun on the fence and tell you to shake a leg before he plugs you ! " Of course you could see from the lines round his mouth and eyes that he was a composite sort of person, capable of humour, capable of grimness.

They talked of Rockies and Sierras. Stewart asked if they knew the Rio Grande, and Lake (to his own astonishment) found

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

himself telling of that great scene with Atterberry in which he so fully confirmed the troubled charge of craziness made against him by that savant in the field.

"And you've been crazy ever since?" said Stewart.

"You bet your life!" answered Lake.

Stewart laughed and told his story, told of how he made the final severance.

"My wife's a mongrel," he explained.

Mrs. Lake was the only one who started, thinking at first that he deprecated. Mamie, who had been told by Archer that the agent had a full-blood Indian wife, wondered, for a moment, if that was a mistake, and if she was really a half-breed. But Stewart went on:

"There's nothing like mongrel blood. You may get some flabby points with in-breeding, but the brains deteriorate. Her grandfather was what they call a civilised Oneida. Yes, he was a servant of the Honourable the Hudson Bay Company. In taking furs from the Columbia to what was then Fort Colville he lost his heart to an Okanagan girl, and she went back with him

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

on to the Columbia. There was a boy of that marriage, half Okanagan, half Oneida, you see. He drifted down among these people, and so my wife has three bloods in her. It was not that she was a mongrel that my people objected to ; it was that she was an Indian. They——" and he told the story of their dire threat. " And I wrote on a piece of paper——" he paused.

Mrs. Lake said : " To go somewhere ? "

He inclined his head to her.

" And did they reply to that ? " she asked.

" They never got it," he said. " It struck me the story was finished. I'd relieved myself by writing it ; it looked nice, deliberately written across the page ; and I lit my pipe with it. That ended the thing more surely than if I'd posted it, for they might have written back to tell me I wasn't a gentleman ! "

It was by these links that there came about the opportunity for Archer to tell Mamie something which he wished her to know, and yet could never bring himself to tell her directly, as the telling would have

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

resuscitated a theme which he felt she would rather have banished.

"Yes," he said, "relatives are sometimes worrying, inclined to be proprie-tial."

"Oh, you are a black sheep then?" said Stewart.

"I upset their views on what is called getting on," Archer replied.

"Want to arrange things for you, even to your marriage?"

It was an unconscious aid and helped Cyrus to voice what was in his mind more with the air of inevitability than as if seeking occasion.

"Yes. They want me to go into the business."

"What business, might I ask?" inquired Stewart.

"Sardine tins, and the Archer patent tin-opener."

Stewart laughed.

"I suppose there is a lot more than tin in it?" he ventured.

"All kinds of money," answered Cyrus. "They didn't like my notion of taking in my own country after leaving college before

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

settling down. The old man said to me: 'If that's your game, you can pay your own way.' We were at cross-purposes. He thought he was felling a tree across my trail, but that was exactly what I had intended to do. He seemed unable to understand that a man could get the notion into his own head of putting himself in training. After all, there is my brother to carry on the business that means so much to the old man. And he's very keen on the *pâté de foie gras* side of life."

"Things could be so comfortable," interjected Lazy Lake, looking at the young man from under his eyebrows, "if only people would not butt in."

"Just had a letter the other day," said Archer lightly, as if to show how far they would butt in, "telling me that the girl I was supposed to be engaged to is going to marry another man, and marry money at that. This is what comes, so they say, of hoboing in the backwoods."

Mamie's big eyes were on him, but Lake laughed and commented: "You don't hobo in the backwoods. You hobo on the railways."

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

Stewart wagged his head. "Yes," he said, "people talk loosely when they get a lot of rope at the butting-in game. I don't want to *knock* your people—I daresay you're fond enough of them, and if they'd leave you alone to find yourself all would be comfortable, as Mr. Lake says—but that 'hoboing in the backwoods' suggests to me how little folks know of how other folks live. Why, you can get *pâté de foie gras* right here in this State if you don't mind torturing ducks, or geese—I forget which. Long time ago, when I was afraid of losing what is called polish, I used to go out every now and again from the mountain labyrinths, hunt out the most high-toned hotel, and stay there for a week or two. Foolishness!" he exclaimed. "All the same, I didn't have to go back East for that. Seattle could do it for you even in those days, and now—why now you can dress for dinner in Spokane and Salt Lake City if you want to. For myself, I prefer moccasins to dancing-pumps. Oh yes, if there are people back East who still think we are all red shirts here they're very far mistaken, and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

it's a certainty you don't run the chance of getting sand-bagged in the Rockies that you do in Chicago."

"What would trouble me," Mamie broke in, with a shy smile at herself, "would be what knives and forks and spoons to use. Our dinners end with the third course."

Stewart took it upon himself to wag a finger at Mrs. Lake, shake his head at her husband.

"So you never take her out!" he remarked. "Ah, that's not right. You should take her out and give her a chance to see just how good the mountains are by comparison. And, at any rate," he added, turning to Mamie, "if any one smirked at you for eating pudding with a spoon, or what-you-may-call-it — asparagus — with your fork instead of with your fingers" (Mrs. Lake eyed him with twinkling uncertainty — suspecting he was a dry "josher"), "such people need not worry you. The scheme is simple enough anyhow. The assortment of cutlery should be ranged by your plate in the order you're going to use it. That's the job of the serving-maid,

## ACROSS A SUPPER-TABLE

waiter, or footman, the same as it's the job of the hospital nurse to lay out the doctor's instruments just so when there is going to be an operation."

"Gruesome simile," said Archer.

"Makes me feel like a cannibal!" said Mamie.

"Oh, well," continued Stewart, "if you did make a slip you need not think it makes you look as if you came from the cannibal islands. And if your hostess happens to smile, you can always have a bit of pleasant but civilised repartee for her"—he wagged his head knowingly—"by casually informing her that in the best society the cutlery is placed in order."

Lazy Lake shook his head.

"That's one thing about Mamie," he said quietly; "she knows nothing of that kind of repartee, and she'd never learn." Then he smiled, and with a nod in the direction of the listening Archer, added: "He's taking it all in, but he's only a kid! When the glamour dies he'll go back—"

"No," said Archer quickly and deeply, "the glamour grows."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

And Mamie would not allow—simply would not allow herself to let certain thoughts stay in her mind, though they would pop in—would not allow herself now to believe that his voice was in some subtle, almost psychic way, launched at her amid the table-talk.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

MAMIE, pondering Archer's personal disclosure, was indignant with that young lady back East whom she did not know. Who was she to take it upon herself to discard such a perfect man as Archer ; and discard for another ? For that was how, on the face of it, it looked ; and yet, next moment, she was considering : " I expect she had two strings to her bow all the time. The man she's going to marry now "—she felt positive, as though she knew the lady, and all her circle, that this was the truth about it—" began to go ahead in the money-making way, and that is the real reason for her giving up Archer."

Conjuring up a vision of the unknown in question, Mamie had another thought : " He wasn't ever really rightly in love with

## CINDERELLA OF SKOKUM CREEK

her. She infatuated him a bit, may be, when he was younger,"—as if he was now old and chary! She conceived the unknown as a very designing person, who had inveigled Cyrus. Did she not know how simple he could be from remarks he had dropped in that first momentous talk on the matter? No—she did not believe that he was ever really fond of that other girl, not really; and this was a pleasant thought for herself too, so pleasant, indeed, that suddenly aware of how pleasant it was, she refused to dwell upon it, switched off. She told herself that it was quite impersonally, just as a friend of his, one privileged to be a friend, that she summed up and made an end of the matter with: "It is very lucky for him that she did not have patience, or that the other man began to make good. Why, he might have been tied for life to the horrible, designing creature!" Then, calming, it struck her that it was not quite fair to invent attributes for the lady and spurn her thereby. She was, after all, despite her intention to dismiss it, not at an end. She dismissed the

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

theme—but it returned! She wondered if he, perhaps, did feel about it, was fond of the girl; but his tone to-night suggested that he was not; it was rather, she thought, as if his eyes had been opened. Well, he was free anyhow, and she was very glad for his sake (she came back to that) that it was so. She knew that he would make any woman happy; even the unseen Dulcie Armstrong he could have made happy—but Dulcie Armstrong would not have made him happy if she had become his wife.

As for Archer—what he had been doing at Skookum Creek he continued to do. Winter settled down; the train passed along the hillside but twice a week; the foothills as well as the peaks were white, and over there in his shack Cyrus wrote and smoked, the relaxation now and then being splitting fence-rails.

There came the first snow to the lower realms (already the higher places were whitened), dry as flour—you could not make a snowball, for there was not dampness enough to give adhesion; it fell, and a wind ran like an invisible hand dusting it up and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

showing the earth beneath. It was whirled in spirals into the falling snow, peppered through the storm ; and, while one watched, the cleared space again was white. It whirled in eddies round the walls, silted in at the windows.

The inhabitants went up in the hills with their axes, to "put in" their felling and, that over for each day, played poker in the long evenings with the faint flurz of the snow against the panes. A wagon was no longer used ; but none troubled to construct a sledge, for a steer-hide did as well for such little haulings and dumpings about their doors as were necessary. The hay-stacks, winter-feed for the ponies and handful of cattle, were fenced about with high palings ; for anon the elk would dare human beings and come down after that hay. They are not tall stories that the people tell you about elk in these regions. It is quite true that if these graceful beasts get a taste of that hay they will stay around for more—and starve, "right there," making mournful sounds ; whereas the elk that are farther off and have no human

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

being's hay-rick to filch from will "rustle" through the winter. If you want to see a starved elk you need not look far from the settlements, but close. Another month, and it was hard to believe that up these draws and gulches were thickets where the bear-weed, devil's walking-cane, thimbleberries, cranberries, all manner of berry bushes were under the drifts, here rounded by wind in sweeping contours, there cut in sharp edges as if by a knife. Amazing also how under the lee of a spur the keen wind was suddenly cut off and there was a sense of seclusion, comfort.

To swing an axe in winter is a blessed thing at times, swings the blood, too, through the veins; in summer it is apt to recall the sad curse as told in Genesis, and gives one a grouch against Adam. But though it is the season for felling trees, that the spring freshet will float to your mill, it is also the season for making hot the stove and, after a day with axe or cross-cut saw (with an interior glow over the jolliness of sitting so, comfortably aware of the banking and drifting outside), enthusing

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

over euchre or ethics, as one is built ; it is a season for reading the books that you have laid in in advance (as squirrels their nuts), or such as may come to you when the snow-plough has been driven into the cuts, whirling-gigging, with its rotary propellor nozzle, the drifted snow up and away in fountains.

Over at the Reserve it was the season for dual occupation also, for trapping and for tale-telling. Mamie discovered how much Archer meant to her when he had been gone close on a month on a visit to the Indians, a visit that he had expected would last only a fortnight. She even suggested that an avalanche might have fallen on him in that narrow cleft where the old trail wound, and caused, by that suggestion, her uncle to look abruptly and thoughtfully at the stove on the rail of which his heels were set (it seemed for the winter), and her aunt to give a brief, sidewise, conjecturing glance at her. Time enough to talk of avalanches ! She was surely nervously premature.

" Why, you won't see no avalanches along there for months, if then. And besides, ain't half the folks of Skookum Creek half

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

a mile higher every day fellin'—and the boys shootin' the logs on the skidway up there? Shucks!"

So Mamie let that fret go, and kept silent regarding the next that came along a few days later—or nights would be more exact, for that dread was born when, awake in the extreme quiet, she heard now and then the dull thud of snow from over-bent branches of fir or pine. Next morning she inquired negligently, over breakfast, why nobody in Skookum Creek ever went in for trapping.

"Don't pay, I guess," said Mrs. Lake.

Mamie pointed out that, when the old chief had ridden down this way to the celebrations of "the Fourth" at Skookum City, she had noticed he was all gorgeous over his store shirt with ermine skins.

"I suppose the Indians trap all through the hills in the winter?" she commented.

What she was prying for was ratification of a hope to allay a fear she did not state; that fear being that Archer had been, not avalanched (she set her mind at rest on that) but snowed up on the way. And she was

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

pinning her hope to his discovery by some Indian trapper.

It was difficult for her, when he did return, not to rush at him and say : " Oh, I was so terribly afraid you were dead ! " difficult just to say : " Back again, Mr. Archer ! And did you have a good time ? Did you see and hear all you wanted ? "

What Mrs. Lake wished to know was if them Injuns over there were all tol'able clean. " You won't mind me askin', but if you've been bunkin' up in any such rancherees as some I seen in my time, I guess I'm goin' to sit apart from you when you come in here shootin' off to Lealie what you can't hold to yourself till you get it down on paper ! "

" They vary," he answered, smiling. " But I've been most nights sleeping at the agent's place. And part of the time I've been bunking with Lame Knee."

" Oh, well, he's clean," she said.

And then Lazy Lake changed the position of his feet upon the stove-rail, putting right foot over left instead of left over right as the arrangement had been for

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

the last half-hour, and gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Did you get old Scars to open the Sacred Bag?" he asked.

Archer nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"I'm so glad!" Mamie most spontaneously broke out.

Lake continued to gaze at the stove, closing one eye and using the V made by his crossed feet, as a rifle-sight is used, to fix a red glow at the stove-hinge. Archer, full of his own pleasure, heard in Mamie's congratulation nothing of what her uncle, thus sighting at the stove-door, heard. And they talked of the old days that had been—as told of in the Indians' so carefully guarded "winter-count," while the hens sat close huddled in rows, all on one leg, in the snow-covered and warmed hen-roost, and not a sound broke the silence of the world without but the barking wail of the coyotes prowling for their small prey in the merely black and white, the un-coloured, twilight that would have seemed awesome here if unrelieved by the hand-

## CINDERELLA OF SKOKUM CREEK

ful of golden lights in Skookum Creek window.

To Mamie these were enchanted evenings, for out of the stories even of a semi-civilised people there can arise cause for many winnowings of these themes that occasion the "long, long thoughts" (as Longfellow had it in that one of his poems which surely even Henley, who would have none of him, would admit had something in it), these long thoughts that excogitating, if fumbling, youth—granted, possession of what is called a soul—must always adventure into.

Her sense of pity was again made manifest when Cyrus told of old Scars translating these winter-counts. The counts (lest not all my readers know) are a pictured history, in some tribes becoming almost hieroglyphic, in others more primitive. Colours, too, as well as pictures have their share in the counts, the colours being used symbolically. Now Scars was sufficiently learned regarding the wisdom of the whites to realise that the winter-counts he kept, and would hand over at death to another, were not a patch on the written histories of the white men.

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## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

So, after he had explained the pictures on the tanned deerskin, going back laboriously year by year, he had suddenly lied. Knowing that his treasured counts went back no great way, as white men look on history, after having explained about three-quarters of his roll, he said : " Before this one the count was not made every year, but every five years."

Archer, alas ! had got enough of the hang of the pictures, and the dabs of colour, by then, to understand that this was not true. Scars might now try to " cook " the story of his tribe's " parchment," but the interpretation of certain pictures clashed with Archer's knowledge of the history of these mountains. He did not contradict the succeeding explanations—or inventions. He merely listened ; but there was a moment when, listening to this (really pathetic, it seemed) hanky-pankying of the count, the rheumy eyes of Scars and his eyes met—and thereafter Scars would tell no more.

" Poor old fellow," interjected Mamie, while Lazy Lake puffed on his pipe and gave ear, reflecting upon the inner significance

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

of the yarn, in his wonted way. "Do you think he spotted that you knew he was trying to pretend that the counts were far older?"

Archer nodded.

"Yes; he spotted," he said. "And next day he came to me," Cyrus paused, recalling, "and confessed that he had lied, that the two white men pictured on the count, whom he had told me were Spaniards who had come up from the far South, were not—were Lewis and Clark, as I had guessed. It was easy, if for no more than where the horses came in."

"You did not tell him you'd guessed?" Mamie asked, in almost pleading voice.

"Oh no. I said nothing after he had done except to suggest that though his counts did not go very far back, that did not mean that his people had kept no counts in earlier generations. I suggested that they might have been lost, older ones, for long ago there were more wars, and more chances of losing them."

"You let him down gently," said Mamie.

"Tried to. I think he appreciated, for

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

he didn't speak at all for a spell, then just shook his head and said he didn't think so ; he was afraid that before then his people were more like the 'other people'—animals—and didn't keep any counts, only told stories, father to son. So I assured him that long ago white people didn't keep printed records, told their history in that very way. We left it at that——" he shook his head. "A simple, childish old savage, all scarred and gnarled, but with something very touching under that smoked hide of his and behind his half-blind eyes. I was easy with him over it, to the point of over-tender," and he smiled at Mamie.

She looked at him and said : " Maybe I'm too soft. Do you think I am ? "

" I ? Oh no ! You are what you are, Miss Lake—and " (Lake changed the order of his heels on the stove-rail) " I did what you're glad to hear I did."

" I am glad," she said. " Poor old fellow ! There's something pathetic about them when you get to know them."

" Um ! " said Lake, and made it a three-some chat again.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

But I will bore you if I go on giving the talks in detail so, these talks in which (as you have sufficiently gathered) Archer and Mamie came to know each other better—talks in which Mrs. Lake was interested in fits and starts, to which Lake brought to bear all manner of critical suggestion, as if he had a new hobby in Archer's chief employment, with ever and again a glance to Mamie, and a new consideration of Cyrus, not without doubt, although he liked him; for Mamie meant more to him, and he had a private renewal of his private expression on a former occasion: "It may come hard on Stella."

Archer also discussed with Lake plans for the next year, not with anxiety (the mountain air was like a tonic of hopefulness), but as one who had already been pretty nearly at the end of his resources once, and had learnt the lesson. They built up schemes for the new year, talked over ways and means. Lake let out that he had heard some one say of his place that it was a "kind of a ranch," and the phrase had been secretly rankling. He wanted

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

to do something there that would make "kind of" simply not a fair description. It was almost as if he and Archer were going into partnership. Lazy Lake pointed out that although he had the name for doing nothing he had not only put in assessment on his claims, and these might sell any day, but had stuck in, during the past season, a few rows of apple trees.

"Home markets are growing," he said. "Why, if we went ahead, and got an automobile in next year, a co-operative automobile, we could run out our produce free of freight-rates right down to the big towns. The cost of the car and gasolene would be nothing in no time."

Yes, that's what they would do. Gregory and Fox were willing to join in. Ellis, paternally, told them that it was a good scheme, though he was hardly personally interested. He was retired. It was not essential to his banking-account that he should excite himself to grow as much as one small crab-apple. The words "opening up," "development," had no lure for him. Lake pointed out what he had done this

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

year in supplying the "humble, home-grown spud" to the Jessie Debrett. Yes, that's what Cyrus would do—market-gardening.

In the midst of these discussions on ways and means came a letter from Punchy Jones at Skookum City, making the tentative proposal that if there wasn't a terrible lot of money in writing these tracts upon the inner life of our aborigines, or if that fountain should run dry and tomatoes, next year, not seem sufficient means of support, Archer might care to act as his manager. He wanted to hustle around and get out on the jobs. "If the post would be worth your while," he wrote, "it would be worth a whole lot to me. You can have no notion, until you begin looking into the matter, how much these bland office guys try to do in the way of knocking down, under the impression that their boss is a better hand at guessing the weight of a heap of stones than at seeing where the cute kinks are made in his books."

If there had been anything like anxiety for the future, with Punchy Jones' hauling

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

knocked on the head here for next year because of the bucket-tramway from mine to summit stop, such anxieties he might now well desist from. "It never rains but it pours," says the adage, and following on this came a letter from a New York publisher who had seen some of Archer's papers and desired to know if he had enough to make a book, and if so if he could supply any really new pictorial accompaniment — un-hackneyed photographs. This proposition Archer read to his good friends, commenting : "One thing this letter forces on me is that I must try to get out to consult authorities ; I must see just how far I have merely been serving up my version of what is already known."

Mamie had a subdued expression and a catch at her heart. How terribly empty this pocket in the hills would be when he went away ! It was perhaps as well for the sensitiveness of that homely little girl (nobody could think now why Mrs. Lake had fixed that style upon her), it was perhaps as well for the sensitiveness of that beautiful, budding young woman that this hint came

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

now that some day it would be quite in vain to listen alert for his step ; because, in the season of mire and melting snows, he received not a tentative proposal, but a definite request from the Secretary of the B.S.E., for him to make one of a quartette to go out upon a research expedition. He had a touch in him of somewhat the same humility that sat so naively, so charmingly, on Mamie. He showed her the letter.

" It is a very great honour," he said. " I can hardly believe it."

He would go, she thought. He would leave the valley. Oh yes, but it was the way —it was for his good. And, incidentally, that girl who chucked him over would see his name in the papers among those others mentioned in the letter as taking part in the expedition. And his folks at home, too—his folks at home who did not understand him ! Just imagine his father not knowing what he meant by saying that it had been his intention to support himself on his wanderings ! Now his folks at home would say : " Our son Cyrus is a member of the B.S.E.R., and is doing work for them in the field."

## MAMIE GIVES ADVICE

So, with a picture in her mind's eye of the valley empty, Archer being gone, "That will be simply splendid for you, Mr. Archer," she said. "This is a real beginning for you in work you are cut out for, in work you have your heart in."

"It is a very great honour," he repeated.

"You deserve it!"

"Do you think I should accept it?" he asked, as if there had been some doubt in his mind.

She saw the possibility of him staying, going on right here beside them with that market-gardening scheme, and in leisure times devoting himself to his work. But she inquired: "You don't want my opinion?"

"Yes," he said.

And despite that last picture in her mind's eye she replied very definitely: "You should accept!" Next moment, amazed at herself, she felt that she should retire into her shell. The gall of it! The definiteness in her voice! She, who not so long ago understood but half of what he said, and followed the rest fumblingly, was advising him in his life.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SOUL OF MAN

CRUSOE—you remember Crusoe, the cat of Skookum Creek who scared Mamie by darting out of the bushes at her while she was still somewhat jumpy after the shock of the teamster affair?—Crusoe, Robinson Crusoe of Skookum Creek, was destined to play a part in this great friendship.

It was after all had been settled regarding Archer's joining that Ethnological Research Expedition among the tribes of the Fraser and the Columbia rivers, to be gone almost a year from the opening up of the lakes till the ice should again begin to veneer them. Crusoe had learned the path between Lake's "kind of a ranch" and the tomato shack, though tomato shack was now a misnomer, for through the winter there had been more fencing and building; and "kind of a"

## THE SOUL OF MAN

regarding Lake's ranch was also now much less apt. He had got himself under the fifth rib of most people, this four-footed citizen, but he was Mamie's especial friend. She knew his tricks, his antics, his individual ways. The trouble was that he was half a Persian, would have passed for full Persian at that, and perhaps it was due to the kind intentions of Nature that, in winter, even those who knew he was but half-Persian were apt to wonder if, after all, the pedigree narrated of him was not erroneous.

"I believe you're a full-bred after all," Mamie used to tell him, stroking the thick coat, and he would look up at her with his big round eyes.

But Crusoe, who had been so alert, comparable in his play with the wild squirrel or cavorting chipmunk, seemed to go off colour suddenly, developed disposition for sitting hunched and brooding in corners. Then he disappeared, and there was anxiety as to his whereabouts, for the coyotes came down close on winter nights, the only disturbers of the pocket's peace, scenting

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

out the hen-roosts. Mamie wondered if they had got Crusoe, and then he was discovered in a cupboard near the roof, close to the stove-pipe's warmth. He gave a little mew and looked round-eyed pathos, but he did not want to eat, so was left alone. When next she went to see how he fared he had disappeared again. His mood seemed to be one of desiring to be left miserably alone ; it was as if, having been found in that cave, he made no protest, but when unperceived sought another.

Where was he ? He had evidently thought of another hiding-place, but as the humans did not speak his language, nor he theirs, it was impossible when he was found in his new lair to gain information as to how or when he had got there. Perhaps he followed Mamie when she went over with a book to Archer's, had slipped in unobserved—he might well do that—found a warm niche and not noticed when she departed again, for Cyrus, later in the evening, reported his presence on a shelf in his shack.

"He looks a bit seedy," he said. "I asked him if he was coming back with me,

## THE SOUL OF MAN

but he didn't budge. Looked as if he wanted to be left there."

And there he remained that night. In the morning Archer came over for Mamie. There was something wrong with Crusoe. He described the symptoms, how the cat wanted to walk, but had lost power of his hindquarters. Mrs. Lake, out of her apothecary lore, prescribed olive oil, and the Lake household returned with Cyrus to administer the dose.

"He has moved a bit," said Archer as they entered. "He was sitting over there."

"Whatever is the matter with you?" asked Mamie, and sat down on the stool, bending over her pet. He gave the feeblest of mews. "You poor thing!" she said, for with an effort he dragged himself to her, flopped down on his side, and laid his head on her foot. He would have none of the olive oil. A little dabbed on his nose he licked off, then shook his head. His trouble was his long hair of which in his many groomings he had made an internal coil.

Mamie carried him home again, offered him dainties, then thought that he was

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

doubtless wiser than human beings in the matter, knew what he was about in refusing to eat. But in the morning he was a dead Crusoe. Kipling has a poem on giving your heart to a dog to tear. You can give your heart to a cat or a horse too, without almost knowing it. Mamie, as Mrs. Lake observed, took on badly. Her handkerchief that day was soppy. She cried a little in the night. No more Crusoe.

Next day Archer said to her: "You want to get your blood in circulation. You can't walk in this mud, so we'll ride. I prescribe for you an hour or two's riding in the sun."

It was the day before he was to leave Skookum Creek. Mamie was a depressed little mortal that morning, but depressed though she was, she felt glad that she had come out, as the ponies slip-slapped up the mountain road. The sun shone; over cut banks snow arched and fell; there was a sound all round of seeping and trickling, a promise of spring. At the top of the first ridge she glanced quickly at him to see if he had marked what had abruptly

## THE SOUL OF M/N

arrested her gaze ; and he was in the act, hand raised, of pointing it out to her—a herd of deer strung across the opposing dappled slope, pausing, all alert, taut, sniffing the wind ; then off—a scurrying tangle of lean legs, on their fodder foraging. They rode a mile or so upward and there halted while the ponies breathed deeply, sending forth, from dilating nostrils, jets that looked more as though of steam than of breath, as in the pictures of fabled dragons.

" What a queer business Life is," said Mamie, looking down on the wakening valley.

" And we know nothing about it," replied Archer. " I often feel scared to touch it. To look on and admire and wonder—yes, that's different. And afterwards"—he stopped, but his voice suggested: " We know still less about that."

" Oh, I know quite well," said Mamie, " that this is not all. I was thinking to-day—there's the creek ; it runs down to the rivers, the rivers to the sea ; but they're all mixed up there, mixed up and salted,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

and the sun draws them up in rain, leaving the salt out, and they are rained down again. They are the same creeks still, and yet they're different."

She paused a long time.

"Yes," said Archer at last. "You mean that perhaps it is something like that with people, that we live many times and have no memory of it, are lost in the whole—nothingness—and are used up again, the same but different?"

She nodded. "Yes, something like that I thought to-day."

"Some people hold the theory, of course," he remarked; "being merged like that in between life and life prevents us remembering clearly, they say, but yet one part of us, some atom in us, will suggest: 'I've done this before!' or 'I've seen this before!'"

"I've felt that!" exclaimed Mamie.

"That's their argument," said he. "One of their bits of cumulative evidence. But there are arguments against even that bit of possible evidence for their theory."

"I wouldn't like to think that's the way of it, somehow," she commented; "but it

## THE SOUL OF MAN

does not matter whether one would like to think a thing or not. To know the truth is better than just being pleased. And anyhow," she added, looking up at the sky, "I expect the Big Truth behind everything would please us every way, if we only knew enough."

He sat silent, worshipping and listening. The feeling was as if he were venerating the soul behind those eyes, the soul that put the expression that was there now upon that dear little face. And as he looked at her he suddenly broke the silence. Shaking his head slowly—

"No," he said, "I don't think that's the way toward the explanation. I believe in the individual soul, growing, expanding, changing, of course. I believe—well—I believe, for example, that you will always be what I call"—he hesitated—"Mamie," he said quietly.

"That's how I feel," she replied, her eyes gazing far off. Then she turned her head and looked at him meditatively.

"Crusoe going off that way, though, started me wondering," she brought out.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

As with a mutual thought they gave the pressure with their knees for the ponies to move on, rode upward another twist in the miry road. They could just see, through a notch in the hill beyond, the twinkle of sunlight in one of the windows of the snowed-over mine buildings.

"Mustn't it look dead up there?" she asked. "Creepy almost—all the bunks empty, all the boys gone; not a house any more, just a shell. Oh, I'm not miserable," she added, "I'm only wondering."

"Everybody must wonder," he assented, "if they've got anything of what is called a soul."

But there was really the other cause for her melancholy—the imminent departure of Archer. They halted to breathe the ponies again, and suddenly he said:

"I'd made up my mind, Mamie, to go away and see how I would get on without saying it, but now I can't. Will you—will we," he found the words ineffectual, "always be together in this Mystery?"

This was what she had never allowed herself to think of, what had always seemed

## THE SOUL OF MAN

so impossible, far-fetched, incredible. And here it was, all true, in the wakening world with the sun melting the snows. Turning, she looked at him and held out her hand, which he lifted to his lips, then lowered.

"Yes," she said, "always."

Thus was the "proposal"; thus were they "engaged."

## CHAPTER XVI

### UNDERSTANDING

"I OFTEN think we are very funny people, we human beings—inside our heads," she said, sitting in Archer's shack that evening, clasping a knee and looking before her with puzzled eyes.

He agreed with a nod and smile. Petite Mamie puzzled was very charming. She made a little twist of her mouth, stretched her locked fingers, and continued to weigh her thoughts.

"We are," he answered at last, and waited for enlargement upon this abrupt statement. His vocal response brought her gaze back from distance.

"We think we have a reason for something, and there's another reason behind all the time," she explained.

Cyrus nodded again.

## UNDERSTANDING

"Why I say that," she divulged still further, "is to show you that I understand well how your mind worked over all these days when we really loved and just called ourselves friends. Do you remember when I seemed as if I didn't appreciate the way that all the boys wanted to catch that teamster?"

He inclined his head.

"All the reasons I tried to explain to you—they were quite true. But there was another, apart just from being sorry for him—mean though he had been—and apart from not wanting a man to get into deep trouble for having shot at me. I didn't want you, above all for me, to shed blood. Oh, I know I would be an awful fool if I was a judge! I would know people were wrong, but I'd let them off—and many of them would only go away and commit crime again. But you came into that; and I didn't want you to do anything because of me that you might regret. I've heard plenty of stories of men being killed for far less than that, but there is something so sacred about life that even when a man has to be put to death for the common good—I mean

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

a real bad man—maybe I'm a coward, only it doesn't seem right. That was the chief reason, I believe now, for feeling the way I did. I was mixed up in it, and I didn't want you——”

“ Good life, dearest! If your husband isn't to draw a bead on a tough that may try to sandbag you on our little passear through this varied world, who——”

“ I know! I'm very foolish. I knew then, anyhow, how much I cared for you, and—he might have killed you, Cyrus! He might have killed you when you were hunting him because of me. You see that, don't you? That was the longest day of my life. I knew then how much I—loved you, Cyrus. And it is so good to know that you were like me then—loving too, and trying to hide it away. It's all very wonderful.”

“ Very wonderful,” he said. Then, as she had finished speaking, he added: “ I've often thought that way—the reasons we give ourselves are not the reasons at all for our actions.” He frowned, and then: “ Do you remember when I first mentioned Dulcie Armstrong to you? ”

## UNDERSTANDING

She met his eyes with great candour, no sense of jealousy here.

"I do," said she.

"Well, I did that—it's difficult to tell, I want you to know—because I was anxious, if I was committed to her, to do the square thing. I was so fond of you—"

"Then?" Her face lit up. She was piecing together the detail of her love-story.

Cyrus nodded gravely. "Yes, and it was a difficult business. I've told you how I did not mention you to her—then how, and why, I did—"

"Tell me again," said she, with a little laugh at herself for desiring to hear what she knew. "I love to hear it."

So he told her all again. This time she had a different view.

"Poor girl!" she said. "I'm sorry for her."

"But she didn't want me," replied Cyrus.

"Yes, I know she *chucked* you, as you said yourself. But I'm so fond of you that I feel sorry for her just now. I can't be too glad for myself, and I'm glad for you too. I'm

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

not good enough for you, but I'm sure she wasn't the right woman."

"Mamie, you must not say again that you're not good enough for me," he solemnly announced.

"Why not?"

"It's so foolish——"

"But it's *true!*" she interjected, one might almost say defiantly.

"—and it's not true," he ended, ignoring her interruption.

"Well, we won't argue," Mamie decided.

"It is all very wonderful."

"That it is!" he cried.

"I was sorry when you told me she'd chucked you," Mamie said after a pause. "You see, I did not know but what you were deeply in love with her, and——"

"You dear, dear girl. You have heaps of capacity for sympathy."

She laughed as if at herself.

"I believe I sometimes sympathise with the wrong people," she confessed. "But go on."

"It doesn't seem worth telling now," said Cyrus, "and yet it was like this:

## UNDERSTANDING

right up till then I was trying to be true to her. I was trying to stay with it—not to let you sit in my heart the way you really were. You were always there. You were there the whole time. It was a queer day that. I got the letter early that week—on the night James tried to shoot you—and the one part of me (primed up to it) felt as if the attitude should have been bowed head and woebegone expression."

" You did look a bit that way, perhaps."

" Did I? No wonder!"

" No wonder?" She tried to cover up the hint of startlement in her voice. " Why 'no wonder' when really you——"

" Because I was in anguish about coming to you as a kind of damaged goods. Picture my position. To try to do a square deal I had told her about you—and you about her! Oh, my God!"

Mamie raised her head and laughed at the solemn man.

" You dear man!" she said.

That laugh eased him.

" Oh, well," he went on, half-smiling too. " I tried to play the game. I told you the

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

truth of that too—chucked! I felt I was not worthy of you by hundreds of miles, and when you sympathised with me I wanted to say: 'But I—'" his voice dropped, "'love you!' How could I?"

"Why, Cyrus," she put her hand on his arm, "you were only human. Dulcie was fascinating, and I—I love you."

Everything is not told at the moment. Years after he might tell her, recalling these days at Skookum Creek, how at that, deep within him, he felt how sacred he must keep his love for her. He was quiet, and she said in slow, meditative way:

"Do you know, a love affair that is like a rush for a free-lunch counter is no good at all! It's the wrong kind of love that has jealousy, too. When I was reading *Othello* I thought that. The real love affair is like a growing flower. I do like you to tell me how you were thinking of me, and how it was all working in your heart and head. And you feeling that way when you got that letter—I like it. Cyrus, you love me very bigly and truly."

"I do, by God, I do!" he said.

## UNDERSTANDING

And as he spoke he looked at the sweep of hills out there, framed in the doorway —had a survey of the vastness. It was no expletive. It was as when one takes oath, and ends solemnly: "So help me God." If the God of childhood was no longer intelligible to the man, what he meant now by "God" was, if less understandable, much more vast, mighty.

"Then," he said, harping on, determined to get all this over, "that day I told you she had written to break off whatever had ever been between us——"

"Was that the way she put it?" cried Mamie.

"Those were her words."

"Oh, I'm glad! It wasn't very much, then!" This she addressed to the distance, slightly pensive.

But Cyrus, seeing her expression, had a new thought.

"You wish there had been nothing?" he asked. He was dejected over the affair with Dulcie, but Mamie, with a glance at his face, amended.

"Cyrus," she made an adorable motion

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

with her hands, "I have you now. I understand. I'm happy. I don't want to argue over, and worry over, and look at, inside and outside, all these other things. Here we are, you and I, and it's not wonderful just for a day—or a season. We've just gone along getting to know each other, and we're going on—always—like, like Skookum Creek down there. Tell me—I love to hear—tell me about me and you."

"We'll live that," said he.

She looked in his eyes with great comradeship.

"You know that song Mr. Fox sings with the words, 'Because God made you mine?' I used to think it was a bit soft. But now I often hear it in my ears when I think of you. I hum it to myself, I'm so happy."

"Which does not mean at all that what has come to us is soft," said Cyrus. "What's come to me, and has been growing up and continuing, makes all the world nearer to me—everybody. And I can see the ore now in a song of Shakespeare's or in a concert ballad. I don't know what God is," he made a

## UNDERSTANDING

gesture including the mountains and the sky, and the scattered house below them, "but *that* is all mixed up in It. And with you I'm ready to go right along through a world I don't understand at all, content that God—the God I really can't say I know the first thing about—is mixed up in it all."

"I know so well what you mean," said she. "It's awfully big. It's no flash in the pan. It's as everlasting as the Pleiades."

"God bless you," said Cyrus. And then, as the sound of the supper gong (or, to be precise, of a familiar tattoo of a jam-stirrer on the bottom of a frying-pan) reached them: "Say!" he exclaimed, "it's time we went down to supper."

She was very subdued, although very happy.

"And to-morrow you go away," she said—for that was the decision.

"Don't make it too hard for me," said M. . . .

Next morning he went away, tore himself from his Cinderella of Skookum Creek, in whose eyes at first seeing he had discerned the fairy princess. Looking back now on

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

their friendship since then, he wondered if he had not, as well, had a premonition of this day. He could not decide the question. No matter ; it was all wonderful enough, and true. And he thanked the Unfathomable God of the blue sky and the white peaks, for her.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PRINCESS MAMIE

MAMIE and Archer both thought that the news of the ratification, or acknowledgment, of their great friendship, made there on the sparkling mountain-side, would be amazing news to those in the valley below ; but Mrs. Lake only blinked once and again and said : " Why, you were surely meant for each other ; he can even give you pointers on fixing your hair." And Lake said : " I knew how it was with Archer long ago—and I knew how it was with Mamie that night she called from the bush. It was Archer she called for first ! "

There was still much of the happy child in Mamie, and it is doubtless good for men and women if a bit of the child remains somewhere in them always. She could invent and imagine still, and in Archer's

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

absence she who had so long repressed the slightest fancies in that direction, now almost played to herself that they were man and wife, that he would be in this moment, was coming down from the hills, or was out in the orchard—really a promissory orchard so far, but, in such tales as she wove for herself while he was away, full-fruited.

She wrote to him, the humble Cinderella, the humble fairy princess, that the more she thought of this continuation of their friendship the more wonderful it seemed, but that she was not good enough for him ; and she thrust under her shirt-waist, carried there all day, a letter from him in which he asserted the same of himself toward her. If she did not post a letter daily to him there was always one on the stocks, and he had his private diary, as it were Mamie's log of the expedition. She had not thought there were so many Indians up there in British Columbia ; from the Skeena River he wrote of the Tsimshian and Nasqa ; from Babine Lake, and the head waters of the Peace River, of the Sikani ; from farther south (her uncle seeing her puzzling over a

## PRINCESS MAMIE

diminutive atlas ordered her a large surprise one), of the Takulli. Mamie's log was no dryasdust one. She had a momentary indignation at that designing and snaffling hussy, as she now considered her to be, who had wanted Cyrus to turn out more of the Archer patent tin-openers, and who had written to him—written, not said, and been sorry for next minute, but written and posted—a statement of lack of interest in what so greatly interested him. It had been what they call calf-love on his side, so she told the walls of his home, "and there's an awful difference between love and infatuation. He loves me, and if I'm not up to much I'm anyhow not designing. I wouldn't even let myself think of it," she said, meaning that great moment on the mountain-side when the dream she had refused to dream came true. And she read and re-read his letters, read the bits about what he was doing twice, perhaps, to the thrice that she read such more intimate passages as: "You! Why, my dear, I've to try to be good enough to merit you." That was his reply to her written statement

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

that, thinking over it all, it was too good to be true, and that she wasn't good enough for him.

To that reply she replied : " We won't quarrel about it, though it is very beautiful that you should feel like that," and without observing what she was about—still almost arguing it ! — she had her word again, for she continued : " It makes me all the more determined to be worthy of your love." To that, in the midst of a long letter he said : " And all I can say about the argument, which you really continue, is ' God bless you.' "

" He has blessed me," she responded.

He had told her that, should any letters come for him, she could re-direct them to addresses he would from time to time acquaint her with, but any newspapers or books that might arrive were to await his return. She was to open them, and lay them aside. There were some newspapers, however, which after opening she again tied up and re-directed. They were newspapers in which paragraphs appeared containing his name, newspapers sent from his

## PRINCESS MAMIE

people, the paragraphs marked. The tables were indeed turned. They had not been interested in his work before. He had never suggested that they were snobs, but she surmised that the designing female was ~~such~~

"I hope she sees the other names too," thought Mamie, for there was a Sir Somebody, baronet, among the quartette—and a Title means more, to many, than merit.

Archer never talked of the possible celebrity side of the work—it was the work only that mattered; but awaiting his coming, imagining him at the door, I think it needs no apology for Mamie that she could not help that side of the thing pleasing her. She even, as the months wore on, thought :

"There you are! His own family have to be told that he's on the right track, and it's the same with his country. M.B.E.S." she snorted. "Member of the *British Ethnological Society*. Oh, well, his own country will waken up yet."

And perhaps those in his own country who cared were watching. Some editors were already aware of him, although he

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

had not been offered what Mrs. Lake called an American "tail" to his name. Maybe there were excuses too. You may recall how, at the monthly dinner at his college, the Professor of History had to tell the Professor of Literature that the young man could write, and how the Professor of Literature, while admitting qualities in his work, slightly evil-eyed it as too florid, or something like that. I don't want to misjudge the gentleman, but possibly he was on the pedantic side of academic.

Mamie was very happy when one day she re-directed to Archer a letter, on the flap of which was the legend : " If not delivered, kindly return to Secretary, American Historical Association, Philadelphia," and a very kindly letter it was, she found, when it came back to her from Cyrus, with his view of its request that he would let the Secretary know if he could put them in the way of certain data.

" He's too humble ! " declared Mamie, for he wrote : " I have told him that I will do my best on my return ; but I don't know that I like this. It's coming too quick—

## PRINCESS MAMIE

up like a rocket, down like the stick, you know."

She told her uncle that she thought Archer was too humble.

"Well, that's a flaw in his character——" he began, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, I don't say a flaw!" she expostulated, then saw the twinkle. "You're joshing me!"

"Then let me say," he began again, "that's a characteristic you need not worry about. It is much better than the other way round. What saith the Scriptures about 'Friend, come up higher'?"

But he was not always "joshing" her; and when he did, the "josh" was designed to help her toward gaiety. He realised well what the pensive expression in her eyes now meant—longing for her ethnologist to return.

One day he, returning from a visit to Fox's (otherwise store and post office), met the eye of his niece, and understanding its appeal, shook his head and said: "Nothing," with a woebegone expression, as if he too had expected some mail and been

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

disappointed. Highly melancholic of aspect, he moved on to the tool-house; but had any prowling skunk been visiting there, it would have beheld a man smiling, for, his exit from Mamie's field of vision thus accomplished, his facial expression utterly changed.

Doubtless the smile on entering the tool-shack was as much at his own facility in imitating himself in dolorous mood as at the little scheme which prompted that imitation. Emerging anon, the twinkle still in his eye, he frowned it abruptly away on seeing Mamie still within view. Apparently it was for her, this pretence of the dumps. As an actor pulls himself together at the wings before going on, so did Lake pull himself together to play his part. Axe on shoulder, he looked like some backwoods version of *The Man wit' the Hoe*.

"I can't do it," he growled, half to the air, half to Mamie.

"Can't do what?"

"Work to-day," he explained.

"You've been working pretty hard recently," said she—which was quite true,

## PRINCESS MAMIE

not merely said in leniency to the quality which had won him his name.

"I feel that I want to get out of this prison for a spell," he ejaculated.

"Oh, not a prison, uncle!"

"That's how I feel!" grimly he assured her; but he looked to her somewhat like a petulant child refusing to renounce a naughtiness, simply for the sake of the spirit known as "staying with it." He had difficulty in expunging the merriment from his eyes, however skilfully he managed to indicate disgust and boredom in nose-tip and puckered mouth. He was no great actor after all, but he succeeded with this credulous and sympathetic audience.

"Why don't you go out, then?" asked Mamie. "It's a long time since you've been out."

"I don't know. I don't want to go alone."

This was too plaintive. She had knowledge of feeling lonely at the moment herself.

"Take aunty with you," she advised. "I can keep things running here for a time."

"She doesn't want to go."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

It was a sacrifice—for by going away from Skookum Creek she might have to delay the perusal of some letters; they would come in her absence, lie here unopened, awaiting her return. If the trip "out" were only for a few days it would not help to re-direct them. It might only mean re-direction "out," re-direction "in" again. It was a sacrifice, but with a struggle (which, though she knew it not, her face announced to Lake, and he, the shaggy wag, found not utterly tragic although he knew the cause of it) she decided, and said:

"Am I any use as a travelling companion?"

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

She burnt her boats.

"I do," she said, so solemnly that he smiled.

"We'll go down to Skookum City this afternoon, then," he told her. "You had better get ready."

There was a squall of rain traversing the land as she attired herself for the journey and packed her grip, the toothed summit of Mount Derry having caught and broken

## PRINCESS MAMIE

a great wind-driven cloud. In her little room, with the window propped open on a stick, she could hear outside the sound like the trailing of a garment of some viewless God going by. It blent with the rush of the creek. Another tune merged with these, the tune of the wind in the higher woods, a subdued note, rising and falling, and rising again up toward some ecstasy, and then again lulling down. And occasionally, from farther off, came a muffled shriek, that one could hardly believe was the gale in topmost clefts of cliff, or, at other times, a noise as of an express train rattling in a hard rock cutting, or again a disturbing and thrilling sound like a great crowd cheering.

For the feel of it all there was a wet freshness; and the smell of drenched pine completed the glamour of the passing gale. Suddenly Mamie almost burst into tears. The heart of all the world seemed to be in that little room; the centre and sanctuary of the planet was that pocket in the great mountain range. Reading had made her desirous to see other parts of the earth; but

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

she felt then, in her nook of a room, listening to the wind, and refreshed by it, a great devotion to this fold of wilderness.

Its sounds and scents were in her blood. She seemed related to them. Uncle Lake sometimes called it "God's country," at other times "this mountain prison." It was no prison. She did not feel at all eager to leave it, even for a day. Besides—she felt that she should stay there till Cyrus came back. He would be picturing the place, seeing here there—and she wouldn't be there!

Yet her head was screwed on, as they say, well enough for her to take such a thought at no more than its sane value. The last letter from Cyrus had been posted at Fort George. He would not be back yet for some time. She could easily accompany Uncle Lealie on a trip to the fringe of the more crowded world, and be home again before Cyrus should return. At any rate, she was committed now, for the sake of Lake's mood.

A few hours later, with two suit-cases at their feet, they stood beside the pole bear-

## PRINCESS MAMIE

ing the announcement: "Flag Stop for Skookum Creek"; and as the train came curving out of the pass, Lake stood forth, making a magnificent high-ball in the middle of the track. The smell of the locomotive, as it roared past them, piston puffing, to a standstill, supplied a certain element of travel-joy. Lake set the grips by the track, and, with them for a step, Mamie mounted agile to the platform of the car.

A brakeman held out his hand for the luggage which Lake threw up, and then brakeman and conductor offered each a hand to lug him up—and off they went, Mamie waving a handkerchief in hope it might be seen by Aunt Lake who, nearer the linen-press, had procured a towel which she waved, away down there. She was a very believing young lady this, and she had no mental reservation regarding Aunt Lake's definite statement that she could not go "out" at the moment with Lake.

So she waved all friendly, and as she waved the scenery waltzed bodily round, shifted grandly, mountain peaks chasing mountain peaks, foot-hill roll eclipsing foot-hill roll—

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

as the train took the next curving grade. The flanges of the wheels suddenly sang high under their feet as they rocked down the aisle. Wondrous sound ! Well did Mamie know it. To every one who loves a corner of earth there is some sound that, if heard unexpectedly, will necessitate a clearing of the throat or a biting of the lip. Who would have thought that the scream of wheel on guard-rail could waken these thoughts too deep for tears ?

They sat down and, twisting their heads, looked at the last of their little nook of world ; and the kink Lake gave his neck belied his earlier statement that the place was a prison ; or perhaps we should call that not a statement, but an outburst.

Skookum City received them with changes. It had altered—as they found out next morning when they could see it widely, by daylight, instead of under the glamour of its electric lamps, by night, when it behoved one to be in none too gullible a mood lest the city was bluffing the visitor by aid of its glitter. It had altered like a flapper back from finishing school. Even since

## PRINCESS MAMIE

Lake's last journey thither the differences were such as to make him give his little "huh!" on alighting at the depot. Concrete had ousted wooden sidewalk; wooden sidewalk that had been torn up by progressive picaroon or pick-point, to make way for concrete, had gone forth farther into the open beyond, former top-side now under-side, to serve another spell. They strolled round in the airy morning, "taking it in," the core of it; and after lunch they adventured into the bungalowed, and anon shacked, suburbs; and there Lake made homily upon these side-walks:

"My sympathy is with the wooden sidewalk. When concrete comes, it goes. The concrete may think it has ejected the wooden sidewalk, but the wooden sidewalk is glad to go nearer to the bush, nearer to the bush, near to the mountains, farther from the steeples."

This was not the way he had been wont, of old, to speak to Marnie. Cyrus had made the change and caused him to treat her as though she too had understanding. His views may have been this, or they may have

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

been that ; but if one never vents views one gives no " jog "—in the word Cyrus had once used to the girl—to others.

" If Skookum Creek shows sign of sudden growth, will you want to leave it ? " Mamie asked.

" I don't know," her uncle meditatively replied. " Skookum Creek is not so bad. Even a sky-scraper there would look foolish under the mountains. If there was a Mount Derry, or Baker, or Angus Mac-Donald alongside of New York, instead of the statue of Liberty, then New York would look like ten cents. Skookum Creek may serve my time," he added, as if he meant, " I have lived a long time."

" Oh you mustn't talk like that ! " said she. " Look at all the trees you've stuck in too ! "

They returned from their inspection of the suburbs—by electric tram, an it please you ! — to the avenues of plate-glass and all modern conveniences. It was there, walking by her side, that Lake suddenly broke out with : " Cyrus Archer is a lucky man."

## PRINCESS MAMIE

"He deserves what he's got," said she. Lake turned his head.

"I didn't mean in getting appointed to that expedition," he explained. "Mamie, you're a peach! Nine girls out of ten would have had no doubt I was thinking of nothing else but what I was thinking of. I meant in marrying you!"

"Cyrus has done everything for me," said she quietly—and could have bitten off her tongue.

It was as if she had dealt Lake a blow. But he knew better than to make expression of contrition then (out of his guilty conscience) for his faults as guardian. That was not what she meant. She would have besought him, had he spoken a word of regret, to believe that she had not meant that. She would have vexed her heart that he so took her words. Not to talk ideas to her had been his policy before Cyrus came along, but there had been no malice in his abstension from such educative chats. It was the result of his reasoned crank, and not due to any cruel design. But she understood that in his affection

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

for her (and her own, for him, it may be said, had strengthening now) he was self-condemnatory.

"Come in here," he said suddenly, and catching her elbow steered her into one of Skookum City's best millinery stores.

"What for?" said she, in the tiled entrance, frocks on one hand, hats on the other.

Was he wanting to atone for fancied spiritual wrong by presenting her with a new dress? He had heaved a sigh, which did not escape her. No, it was not that; she understood him well, and she knew that this visit to the milliner was apart from any immediate sense of contrition over what he considered unworthy guardianship.

"I'm a queer girl," she said. "I like pretty frocks and things, but I don't care much for window-gazing."

"This is going to be no window-gazing," he replied. "I want you to look round inside until you discover just what you would like Cyrus to see on your head—and have it. If you were a different kind of girl I'd say: 'Look round and see what you

## PRINCESS MAMIE

think will make other women count the cost—”

“ No you wouldn’t. You would disown me,” she said, and gave him a glance that went into his heart. And he said, to himself this time: “ Cyrus is a lucky wog. If he isn’t good to her I shall surely pursue him with a six-gun ! ”

“ What did you say ? ” she asked.

He realised that the dire threat part of his speech, the tail end of it, he had spoken aloud as he slowed down to give her entrance before him, walking at her heels.

“ Nothing,” he replied. “ Now you can look around and choose.”

Lake felt terribly out of his elements; but he had compensating zest in the pursuit. The attendant who conveyed them was sympathetic, seemed not to see him as at all out of place, seemed, further, to take a personal interest in the quest for the hat of the lines and shades for which Mamie was made. When one was at length selected, Lake said :

“ Put it on right now. You keep it on.”  
“ Oh no, I can put it on when—”

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Are you staying in town?" asked the assistant. "If so, I can deliver it."

"You deliver the old one," said Lake definitely, as if Mamie had no claim to so much as a foible to call her own; and he made the motion of feeling for a cigar—signifying an end of all this trivial discussion.

Mamie cast him one shrewd glance; and it was with alacrity that she obeyed the tyrant giver of the gift, and, new-hatted, she followed him eagerly to the exit. Eagerly she fell in step with him in the sweeping tiled vestibule (of which the citizens were as proud as the proprietor), and caught his elbow.

"Why did you want me to wear this new hat at once?" she demanded.

"The train from Spokane pulls in at 16.50," he replied.

"Uncle Leslie! He's——"

"He is! He wrote me not to tell you. It was to be a surprise home-coming, but I thought we'd go him another—and surprise him by coming to meet the train."

"Oh you dear!" said Mamie. "You

## PRINCESS MAMIE

dear man!" and so Lake was mollified for the stab she had unwittingly given him so recently. Here was balm to the self-condemnatory guardian.

The hotel rigs were already rattling depot-wards as uncle and niece came on to the sidewalk outside the millinery emporium of the great plate-glass windows and the grand granite front. From its upper windows (trimmed hat department) one could look over the roofs directly out to the city's environs and see the one-storey frame-houses (with the bogus two-storey fronts, some even with bogus windows painted on them); could see, from the top flat of that elegant establishment, the little lines (like insignificant veins far from the main arteries) of the last sidewalks, a plank broad, losing themselves, beyond solitary stove-piped shacks, among scrub and boulder.

But at the ground floor it was different. One descended in an elevator, stepped out, and walked to the door on an ever so slightly slanted floor (it seemed designed, like a stage, for "walking on"), and so made, hardly aware of the cause, an im-

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

pressive exit—on to a street only the middle of which told of anything in the way of Frontier. Granite and plate-glass, on either side, rose from the concrete. The signs of the store-keepers on either hand, along the vista, led to the opinion that those who came down from the mountains need go no farther if all they sought was a shopping centre—and, truth to tell, the signs were not bluffing. You could do yourself very well, as the phrase is, in Skookum City.

Fine hotels projected their verandahs overhead and displayed a fascinating blend of names, some suggesting the sybarite, others jogging the passer-by to recall that here was really a jumping-off place for wilderness. *Hotel Metropolis* looked brazenly across at the *Stockman's Hotel*; *The Gold Nugget House* leered sideways at the glinting *Western Delmonico*. There were residential flats above many of the ground-floor stores, with sun-blinds such as make one think of Parisian boulevards. There were other flats, on the windows of which neat lettering made announcements relative to *Real Estate, Painless Dentistry, Stamp Photo-*

## PRINCESS MAMIE

*graphs, Cabinet Photographs, Legal Advice, Massage, etc.*

It was all enough to make one forget that from the third storey of the millinery emporium one could look out across Five Mile Plain to the hills—to the eternal mountains, and see, if not actually Mount Derry, at least the range that hid Mount Derry. By aid of a strong telescope, perched up there, one might be able, in the season, to pick out a bear and see her taking her family for a walk. But most people did not think of that on First Avenue. There the motion-picture houses lured and the visiting mountaineer forgot he was a mountaineer, and bathed in the metropolitan atmosphere.

The street offered many radiant colour schemes, as Mamie, in radiant mood, now perceived even more keenly than she had on arrival. The fruit-store windows piled up oranges and peaches, apples and pomegranates. The polished arms of candy-stretchers turned unceasingly in the centre of a window. At the sidewalk's edge an erect barber's pole, inside a glass case, revolved and revolved, fascinating the

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

youngsters who were not blasé by the effect of the turning stripes of colour. To the ingenuous gaze it seemed as though, by some necromancy, the pole was everlastingly coming up out of the ground and then simply dissipating itself in air. Simple immigrants have been known to stand puzzled in contemplation before that sign, cudgelling their brains for the explanation, and asking each other: "Where does it go to?" Artists, too, have enjoyed it with unfeigned, but furtive pleasure. For it is a material world, and that man who has not, ere middle-age, discarded the love of kaleidoscope and kindred toys, runs the risk of contumely from the hustlers.

But Mamie appreciated the barber's pole, revelled in the vista of the street with the Idaho Book and Drug Store at the corner, decorated on either side of its door by monthly magazines hung in ribbands; one of its windows stacked with note-papers, white and cream, blue and lilac, and another with soaps—balls of soap, ovals of soap, a fine arrangement, an enticement for the eye.

## PRINCESS MAMIE

Passing a music and pianoforte and organ establishment, a gramophone pursued her, a baritone singing a song of lovers meeting. She saw everything, heard everything, experienced everything. That was the mood, or the state. The jewelers' stores showed entralling attractions, picture-wise. She had no greed of purchase—it was enough to see. Mother of pearl set in silver was as charming as opal in gold. The window-dressers of Skookum City seemed to be artists all.

She heard all round the frail tip-tapping and frou-frou of the light-shoed city dames, the slow hammering heels of the out-of-work, or holidaying, miners and lumber-jacks ; she marked the contrast between the sound of human beings passing, and the faint patter the horses made loping along in the deep loam of the street. The rigs went past with just a pleasant jingle of harness and flurr of leather.

And you may be sure she heard, alert, when the locomotive of the incoming train gave its deep bellow at the far end of the yards, preparatory to shutting off and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

sliding to the platform. As they entered the small, but consequential, booking-hall, the rattle of baggage-wagons broke out—and next moment came the clang of the locomotive bell on the last glide. They came on to the platform as the engine gave its puff of "Finished!" and the coon attendants dropped off the cars, posing as though they were the mighty ebony crux of the whole situation.

But Mamie saw them not. She saw nothing now but the blur of a train, the blur of a platform, the blur of a world into which she looked, knowing that one spot of it would suddenly be alive, disentangle itself. Travellers to Saghalie changed here, and if Cyrus had arrived he must appear on the depot platform.

And then a hand caught her elbow, and turning she found him looking down on her. He seemed to have come there beside her out of nothing; it was as if he had been riding on the cow-catcher!

"Mamie, dearest, I can't tell you how I felt when I saw you standing there. If it hadn't been that I could see you were

## PRINCESS MAMIE

desperately looking for me, I would have stood enjoying you until you spotted me. Anything wrong with Lake?" this as an afterthought.

"No—he's here," and Mamie glanced round. But Uncle Leslie was nowhere to be seen.

"I wrote to him," said Cyrus, "to tell him I was coming, but I wanted to surprise you, and I suppose——"

"He thought to surprise you," she explained. "He didn't tell me what we came to Skookum City for until half an hour ago. And he was here just now."

"Probably saw me, and then pulled out," said Cyrus.

The porter of the hotel at which they had put up intervened, touching his hat.

"Excuse me," said he, "but are you looking for the gentleman—Mr. Lake, I think the name is?"

"Yes," said Mamie.

"He told me to tell you he'd gone back to the hotel."

"Oh, thank you!" (The porter faded away to confiscate somebody's luggage.)

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

"Then what do we do? Do we just go on to Skookum Creek alone? We can't go up to the hotel and come back in time for the train. They're making it up on the siding there already."

"Perhaps he expects us to," said Cyrus.  
"But it doesn't seem——"

"We could stop over with him."

"We will. I'll see the baggage-man and tell him I finish here. My grips must not just be flung out on the mountain side up there without me to look after them. Come along."

The baggage-man interviewed, Cyrus's check produced, and the "grips" found, the alert hotel porter bobbed beside them again with: "Excuse me, are you——?"

"Yes," said Archer. "That dunnage there can go aboard."

All this stir on the platform made them feel as though they had not really, rightly, and quietly, met till they were in the hotel rig at last. Then Mamie, sitting an inch closer, said: "It is good to see you again."

"Good!" exclaimed Cyrus. "Why, it's—who's that up beside the driver?"

## PRINCESS MAMIE

She looked, and saw Uncle Lake's back. He, on seeing that Cyrus had arrived, had strolled out to the yard and nonchalantly perched up there on the hotel rig. He now glanced over his shoulder, gave a little nod and twinkle to Cyrus as if he had only parted from him a minute ago, then took out a cigar, bit off the end, and considered the horses' broad haunches and narrow necks. That greeting over, the eyes of Cyrus and Mamie met. They smiled.

"Quite casual," said Cyrus, with a chuckle.

"As though you hadn't been away at all," said Mamie.

"Neither I have, in one way," he answered. "I've been with you all the time."

And then the porter sang out: "All aboard!" the driver stepped to the hub, swung to the seat, lifting the lines, chanted: "Right away!" and the rig waggled off soundless in the deep sand, more like a lyric of harness trappings and bells than a vehicle.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

It mattered not that the hotel-proprietor's daughter in the private sitting-room was playing, with one finger, over and over again, the outstanding portion of "Everybody's doing it"; namely: "Everybody's doing it—doing it—doing it!" The tinkle was feeble and remote, and as little disturbing as the crackle of grasshoppers on a day of June. Earlier in the day it had worried Mamie, heard ceaselessly along the corridors; but now (though evidently after breakfast, after lunch, all the time, with only pauses for meals or to take the paper off a new section of chewing-gum, was it to continue) it did not worry. It was to be part of the memory of that day.

It mattered nothing that a few doors away, westward, a gramophone was dis-

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

coursing a Sousa march and, on this side, somewhere underneath, another was warbling the last vaudeville ditty which, doubtless, would next week be the one-finger repertoire of the proprietor's daughter, to the ousting of "Everybody's doing it—doing it—doing it—" It mattered nothing that a voice pierced ever and again with: "Come in! Come in and see the boys in blue entraining for Chihuahua! Passing events—strong dramas—and comic reels!" That last sound anon ended, evidently sufficient people having *gone in*.

They had sat there, on one of the hotel verandahs, after supper, Lake and Cyrus and Mamie, like a new kind of caryatid, Lake in the middle, Mamie to left (leaning forward to right), Cyrus to right (bending forward to left), talking of the expedition, talking of doings at Skookum Creek; and it pleased Lake to feel that they were no fevered young people these, desiring his departure with terrible ardour. He had thought they might go right on to Skookum Creek on the spur-line, and be all to themselves—hence his flight at the depot. Their pursuit

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

of him pleased, implying that though Mamie must leave him for good soon, he did count.

As he smoked his cigar, part placid, part elated, between them, though he did not say so, did not quote it, the couplet kept ringing in his ears :

"Journeys end in lovers meeting,  
Every wise man's son doth know,"

and eventually he craned forward, looked over the verandah rail to make sure no elegant and inflammable hat was below to receive it, then tossed his cigar-end away, rose, and the new kind of caryatid that had been a threesome now became a two-

~~some~~

"Just going round to the library," he said. "It may still be open. They have some kind of library here."

Others who came along the corridor and, looking out, saw Cyrus and Mamie there, retired to seek another open-air niche somewhere else. So they sat on, watching the mosquito hawks dart and wheel and veer and careen over the city, sat on like people who

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

had come home, as the sky went through its slow, deliberate changes, a long sequence of ravishing effects. They talked of many things; Cyrus, in the way of men back to their women-folk, poured forth the story of the expedition, story after story, although all had been told in his voluminous letters.

They must have talked of other things too, for long after, when Mamie, reading in a book of the meeting of two famous philosophers, came on the words: "There we sat down and talked of the immortality of the soul," all this came back to her with intense clearness, she and Cyrus sitting there, the hum and crackle of the city, the painted and blistered verandah, even to the design of the rail-carvings, the roofs opposite, the zig-zagging of the mosquito hawks against the crumbling sunset and the first of night, and the one-finger tinkling in the private sitting-room down the corridor.

Sitting here with Cyrus she experienced what she had once before experienced in his presence: a sudden sense of getting outside of herself, looking on, seeing them

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

both sitting there. The mosquito hawks ceased to fly. The shop-fronts glowed; lights sparkled in windows, and suddenly he broke out:

"Say! Have you ever been for a spin in an auto?"

She never had. Sheriff Peters once offered on a grey occasion that she did not care to recall this halcyon evening to give her and Aunt Lake "a whizz up the road" in his car; but either because she looked then scarcely in fettle for joy-rides, or because he forgot, he had gone away leaving her without the experience.

"No," she replied, "never."

But what chiefly occupied her was a wonder as to what had taken his mind to automobiles. Hers, too, had been on the theme; and when she saw that he had noticed what doubtless, sub-consciously, had brought cars to her thoughts—a sign down the street pricked out in electric globes: "Gasolene"—she realised that here was not telepathy.

"Come along," said Cyrus, and rose and led the way down.

"What are you going to do?"

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

"We'll go 'in' by auto," said he. "We'll engage a car now."

As they swung along the sidewalk she kept him with head bent while she theorised on the fact that when he spoke of an automobile she was also thinking of autos, and had thought for the moment it was a case of telepathy until she saw—

"The sign lit up," said he.

She nodded.

"It's all so good," she went on, "that it would be foolish to try to make it seem—oh, what's the word?"

"Super-something. I suppose; supernatural—occult, something like that?"

"That's it! It's all so good that there's no need to turn it into a pseudo—uh—pseudo-occult story, is there?"

"Heaven is right here," said he. "This is occult enough for me—you walking along with me, you and me walking along to an electric sign pricked out in diverse colours to hire an automobile that will spin us through these fir-forests home. It is miraculous enough without trying to Maeterlinck it." He drew breath. "All the way

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

down from Spokane the wheels kept singing to me a bit of an old English song :

' Oh, madam, I will give to you  
The Keys of Canterbury,  
And all the bells of London  
Shall ring to make us merry,  
If you will be my joy,  
My sweet and only dear,  
And walk along with me anywhere.'

She's a bit of a mercenary chit in the ballad, but anyhow that's what the wheels sang, and her answer :

' And I will be your joy,  
Your sweet and only dear,  
And walk along with you anywhere.'"

" Beautiful," said she. " And I'm not Maeterlincking it a bit when I tell you that the wheels coming here from Skookum Creek sang to me Mr. Fox's old song ! Oh, listen ! "

They were passing that music store, and the door was open. On a table just inside stood a gramophone, the horn protruding ; and it broke out now with " Mr. Fox's song." They did not think Destiny was " Maeterlincking " it for them ; it was

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

a coincidence—in a world the realities of which are as wondrous and mysterious as the so-called mysteries. They walked on, very happy, with the gramophone singing to the street :

“ Because God made thee mine  
I'll cherish thee,  
Through light and darkness,  
Through all time to be . . . ”

and with the voice of that unknown singer carolling, “ Because you come to me . . . ” they paused under the coloured lights reading :

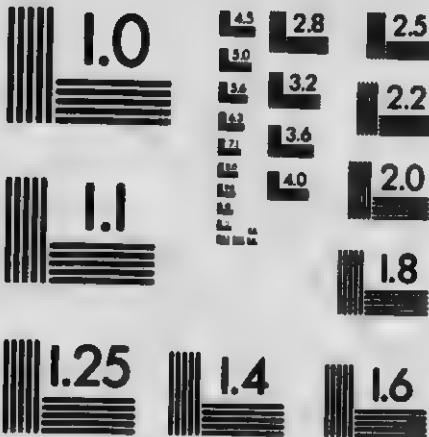
“ GASOLENE.”

Arrived beneath that illuminated sign they found a gateway into a yard and, to one side, an office showing a light. Over the portal was the announcement that these were the premises of Mr. Peter Jones, who contracted for all manner of haulage work, provided horses, riding, draft, and pack—and automobiles.

Having read this proclamation they looked one to the other, and Cyrus was a trifle ashamed that he had utterly forgotten his one-time boss and friend. As they pro-



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## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

spected into the yard toward the office, the door opened, and there stood Punchy, hand on electric switch, silhouetted against the bright interior, a cigar glowing and waning under his scrimp nose, radiating the perky tip. But he did not switch off the lights. Instead, his hand went to the broad-brimmed hat, which he swept off, seeing a woman before him. Then he suddenly recognised her, recognised them both.

"Well, I'll be—well!—say! I'll be—say, step right in," said he.

They stepped in, and Punchy took Mamie's hand as though it were fragile, and then Cyrus's as if it were cast-iron, and yanked a chair over the counter for Mamie. It was clear that he thought this was a friendly visit, no business call, above all, no accident; and not for worlds would either have him disillusioned.

"I didn't know you at first, Miss Lake," said he. "I can hardly believe it's you. Say, she's changed some," he exploded to Cyrus.

"I'm older," said Mamie.

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

"By—er—say, it's sure amazing! You've taken a right jump. But you ain't changed, either—you've just gone and made yourself what you showed right along—yes, right along—that you were. It ain't the fixin's—if you don't mind me commenting, seein' I knew you when you was knee-high to a grasshopper, as the adage goes—it ain't the hat and the trimmin's. It's just as if you had nacherally gone and done what all along I felt you had in you."

"Well, I'm awfully glad you're pleased with me," said Mamie.

"I was always pleased with you," responded Punchy Jones. "You was sure the Princess of Skookum Creek right along for me—yes, right along. How long have you been in town?"

She told him.

"And when do you go back?"

"To-morrow."

He looked surprised, just for the flicker of a moment.

"Did you ever have a ride in an auto-beel?" he asked. "That time I came up with the sheriff it wasn't till he got to

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Horse Thief Creek that he remembered. He jams on the brake and, says he: 'We never give that young lady the whizz I promised.' But Horse Thief Creek was right afraid of us by then, and we reckoned we would look foolish goin' all the way back to give you your whizz. Did you ever have one? "

She shook her head.

" Well, I'm goin' to give you a present of a joy-ride. I got an auto-mo-beel. I got three auto-mo-beels, by— Beg your pardon. I got six teams workin' and three auto-mo-beels, and—say, Archer!—I got a cashier-kid that don't get no queer kinks in the books. He makes them plain to me. It wasn't my head was wrong. I can savvey book-keeping now. If a man is doing a square thing he can make it plain to folks—so be they ain't born fools. If a man can't explain a thing so you can savvey it—I guess it got a kink in it somewhere. You been making good," and he wagged his head at Cyrus. " I got your picture cut out of the paper. I got it in my pocket-book." He produced the

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

pocket-book and disclosed a newspaper cutting. "Yes, siree. I cut that out. I said to my cashier: 'I don't know what in hell—beg your pardon—Miss Lake ethnologisin' for a livin' is, but if this fellow can ethnologise as expert as he can swing a team he can sure ethnologise!'"

His gaze roved from Cyrus to Mamie and back again, and their interpretation of something in that gaze caused them to glance one to the other. Then their eyes returned to him, and the thing was repeated. He looked at them, seemed expectant, waited, dropped his eyes—to give them opportunity to decide the question.

The trouble was his *idle fixe*. It had been fixed from the moment they entered. He had no notion that his garish sign had lured them to see him. He surmised they had come to tell him—an old friend of Skookum Creek days—that they were going, as he would have phrased it, "to run in harness." He was deeply pleased that they had (for such was his view of their case) planned to drop in upon him with the news. And

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

now he thought they had been beset by shyness.

Punchy was wrong in all his surmises, however. Now that they were here in the presence of the alert little man (and a trifle shamed, in face of his pleasure at their call, that it was an accident), part desiring to make amends, part because of his friendliness, they wanted to tell him the news. But neither was certain if the other was similarly moved. As Punchy dropped his gaze Cyrus nodded to Mamie; she wirelessed that she couldn't—he must.

"Mamie and I are going to be married," said he.

Punchy looked up.

"I knew," he said solemnly.

"Who told—" began Mamie.

"Why *you* told me," said Punchy. "Both of you told me. If you wasn't going to be—why then, everything would be wrong! Nothing would be what it seemed. I'd doubt the simplicity of that cashier's book-keepin' what I've extolled to you. That's the only kind of love matters. The other kind is N.G. I seen a lot of it around.

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

It's the kind that jealousy travels alongside of. No confidence to it. There ain't enough oil in the grease-box, and the axles get fixed. I seen a lot of the good kind too. Oh, there's a hell of a lot of—beg your pardon—happy marriages." He abruptly looked into distance. "I understand you folks' happiness," he said. He produced his pocket-book again and fingered about in it. "Cut this out a paper once," he said, and handed a cutting to Mamie which she read with a look of not understanding why it had been shown to her. Cyrus, leaning to her, read also:

"I know not how it is, but all the past  
Is with me, speaking of its early things,  
As old men like to talk about their youth.  
And in its voice a clearer, sweeter chord  
Is heard, and I, half in a waking dream,  
Musing upon the music, think a while  
Like one who on a sudden sees two paths  
Before him, and, uncertain which to take,  
Halts for a moment till his eye alights  
On some familiar mark or shape of hill  
Seen years before, and straightway goes his way.";

Cyrus and Mamie read together, puzzled.

"It's the end of it," broke in Punchy, and turning abruptly brushed dust from his

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

counter with the flat of his hand. They read on :

" So, thinking on that voice, a gracious time  
Comes back, and in its light I stand, and say,  
A touch of sorrow in my whisper, ' Strange  
That there should be so much to move my soul  
In words so plain and simple—*Agnes died.*' "

Then they looked up. Punchy held forth his hand, standing there stolid, and Mamie surrendered the cutting. He replaced it in a section of the many-pouched pocket-book.

" I just showed you that," he said, " so you could know I understand. Some folks wouldn't understand. Her name was Agnes, you see." He canted up his head, cigar in right corner of mouth again, canted up his head to evade an eddy of smoke that was in his eyes.

Cyrus did not understand, but Mamie did.

" I never knew," she said, in a low voice.  
" I'm so—sorry—Punchy."

" Oh—long ago—I know how you feel all right. Oh, don't you go lookin' sad. I didn't mean that."

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

He clapped his heart where the pocket-book reposed. "I don't go much on th' average pomes—might as well be written rational. Some folks seem only to write in poetry what would look foolish in straight words in nacheral lines. Rough on genuwine poets I call it. But this bit of poetry I could understand. There was sense to it. There now I gone and made you sad when I was only wantin' to let you know I surely savvey. You got Romeo and Juliet skinned. Yes. You got it on you as if you carried a notice to that effect—yes, lit up like ray sign," he added. "Say, that's some sign!"

"It's a good sign," agreed Cyrus.

"First coloured sign in Skookum City!" said Punchy. "Yes, siree. First coloured sign in Skookum City." He returned to his visitors' affairs. "Yes, you got it advertised all right. Nothing soft and giggling—don't take me erroneous. You got it advertised not that you're lookin' forward to bein' married, and ain't it a picnic? You got it different. You got it on you that you've surely fixed it up, and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

sooner or later you're goin' to make the announcement casual to whoever it may concern. You're married right now in a manner o' speaking."

Mamie blinked. Cyrus looked at his old boss with understanding, and then nodded.

"We'll not have a speech from any sky-scout better than that," said he.

"What are you going to do afterwards?" Punchy asked.

"I'm not quite sure. If I can work it, I think the home will be in Skookum Creek. I don't see why we shouldn't raise the apples for Skookum City."

"Skookum City is sure going good. She's some burg. There's markets here. But what about ethnologising?"

"There will be that also. I'm in touch now with one or two men who will post me up. I don't know if I ever mentioned to you that my father cut up rough when I didn't make my trip West only a trip, but he's all right now. Vandervelt——"

"J. D.? The millionaire?"

"Yes. He's talking of financing an Ethno-

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

logical Research Society for these States. The old man knows him, and has been handing out my stuff. I've to tell him if I want the dough to start up, so far as I can see from his letters, a kind of fruit-ranch that will make the folk of Hood River, Siskiyous, and Medford come 'look see'!"

Punchy stroked his chin.

"I suppose a side-line of shares in a goin' concern—contractin'—would look like ten cents to your penitent parent?"

Cyrus smiled.

"Oh, I don't know," said he.

"Well, don't forget," said Punchy.

"I won't. But I'm going to have a long talk with Lake. He has some scheme for doing something with Skookum Creek."

"I hear he's Lazy Lake no more," said Punchy. "He's been stickin' in trees, and he don't call a dug-out a sow, and a hog a ranch no more. I would spin you up myself to-morrow to look at the old pocket if it wasn't that I got an appointment in Spokane. Fact is—well—I'm thinking of takin' over a contractin' business there—in Spokane."

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Mamie laughed. He said this as though ashamed of his progress.

"' Westward the course of Empire takes its way,' I guess," he added.

"We'll drop in on you in Spokane some day," said Cyrus, "and find you've gone off to Seattle to corner the contracting work for the Pacific Slope!"

"Guess I'll be contractin' with a chariot of fire long before then," answered Punchy. "I hope there's some kind of horses in Heaven. Auto-mo-beels are all very well for an experience, but they don't respond," and he crooked wrist, held forth a hand as though holding the lines.

But somebody was hovering at the door, evidently waiting for their departure. It might be some one connected with the Spokane proposition--so they made an end.

"Oh, what time to-morrow?" Punchy called after them.

"I don't like to——" began Mamie.

"It's a present I want to give you," said Punchy, in a tone one might almost call querulous. "How would ten o'clock suit?"

"Well."

## THAT NIGHT IN SKOOKUM CITY

"Good."

They turned away and in the street looked at each other.

"Poor old Punchy!" said Cyrus quietly. Mamie blinked her eyes.

On the way back to the hotel another sign lured them:

"IDAHO BOOK AND DRUG STORE."

"Why book and drug?" said Cy. "Come in, Mamie. Books are not all drugs, are they? It's a queer combination, when one considers it. Just for a look round the shelves," he said to the assistant who advanced upon them.

They wandered round, considering the ranged volumes, and at a turning—behold—there stood Uncle Leslie like an effigy. He had evidently found something, for he moved a little closer to the wall, without looking round, to make room for the passers-by of whom, though conscious, he was heedless. But they stood fast, one on each side of him, smiling. Presently he felt their proximity, looked quickly up, and—

"Oh!" he said, then seemed to take them

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

for granted. Straightway he gave an exhibition of that manner of procedure which Mamie once told Cyrus she enjoyed. There was not even a word of salutation beyond that "Oh!"

"Fine!" he said. "Fine! I'm taking it with me, but I had to read a bit or two standing here. It's years since I saw it. Don't you like this, you people?" and he read:

"' Whosoever is harmonically composed delights in harmony. . . . For myself . . . even that vulgar and Tavern-Musick, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the First Composer.'"

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## CHAPTER XIX

### ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

RUMOUR had been abroad in the streets of Skookum City. It is interesting to scout out the beginnings of gossip, and one may hazard that maybe the chauffeur, called upon by Punchy Jones on his way home, and told of his morrow's duty, had casually commented to the friend in the hotel sitting-room, from chatter with whom Punchy had beckoned him: "I'm going up to Skookum Creek—end of wagon road."

Doubtless, then, that was the beginning of this, and reason why, when the automobile, at the appointed hour, swept to a standstill before the hotel, palpitating there, men sitting in the windows of the main hall cast their eyes upon it as they did. Some one the chauffeur knew, passing, flung him a

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

salutation, exchanged a word or two, and moved on with a congratulatory nod. He, too, would carry the news.

A little knot of men appeared on the side-walk and gazed upon the wheels, or stared at the bonnet, or fixed their eyes on the exhaust of that automobile that sat there so circumspect but would soon be scaring the forest-creatures on a ninety-mile rush through wilderness. It is doubtful if the mechanical side, in this instance, was the attraction to them. The word went round —“Skookum Creek!”—“Skookum Creek!”—up and down the street, and from chair to chair in the hotels where out of work, or holidaying, lumber-jacks and miners sat looking out on the side-walk like observers of a play in the fauteuils.

It ricochetted—“Skookum Creek!”—from one to another. A commercial traveller in checked grey, with white hat and knobbly boots, quill tooth-pick in hand, inquired of a man in Mackinaw coat, wooden tooth-pick between teeth, if Skookum Creek were not some distance off.

“Oh, about ninety mile,” said the heavy

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

one,—“under a hundred, I guess. It's all of a road all the same.”

They looked at the automobile. They looked along the avenue, to the vista beyond, of open plain. Their imaginations—or their knowledge—pictured the tossing journey in store for somebody. Then Lake came forth with a jag of books in one hand and a new rifle slung over his left shoulder, a new axe in his right hand—the same old Lake, and deposited these purchases in the machine. It was like the ringing up of a curtain. His load deposited, he stood there, a volume of polished and antique English protruding from his coat pocket—and his speech all vernacular to the driver, ungrammatical and highly picturesque, the speech you hear wheresoever the nomadic-hearted gather together—they who haunt the picturesque and unsubdued, hardly aware that they do so, hardly aware of all it means to them till, by some chance, they stray from it. The irony of it all is that it is these lovers of the frontiers and wilderness that are the wilderness-breakers. They prepare a place in it for those to follow—whose ways they disesteem.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Came forth the hotel man next, carrying "grips," which were strapped on to the car. That strapping was mildly watched by the interested groups. It was a performance that it was second nature to them to note with keenness. As they were wont to watch the throwing of square or diamond hitch before the grocery-store, when the pack-horses stood there a-row, so did they watch this, naturally utilitarian and imaginative at one and the same time. That strapping had to be good for ninety miles of jolt. The romance of travel was in the air, as when men on the dock front see the *Blue Peter* break at a mast-head.

Some such notion, or comparison, must have been in Cyrus's head as he came out with Mamie, for he quoted not from Henley's "Song of Speed," but from Longfellow :

" ' I remember the black wharfs and the slips,  
And the sea-tides tossing free,  
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips ;  
And the beauty and mystery of the ships  
And the magic of the sea.' "

To judge by the nod and smile with which she heard him out, she also tapped, if

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

indeed she was not highly party to, the sense of travel joy that thrilled around that hotel door like ripples in a pool when a stone is thrown. She smiled with understanding as he held open the door. There! The leading lady in this first act (all that the onlookers were to see!) was aboard; Cyrus followed, Lake rolled in beside the driver—and then they bucked. One buck, one spring, like a cayuse under a cold saddle, and off they rushed.

A squeal of astonishment and joy had to be summarily squashed by Mamie. She very nearly squealed outright. The car whirled round and plunged into a side street, whirled out of it, and a horse, suddenly met there, stood up like a unicorn in heraldry—to the momentary jeopardy of its rider. That street rushed under them, with figures standing on either hand. The impression they gave was as of being all puppets ranged there by some toy-shop man.

That was the right way to start. It was "up to" the driver to be spectacular; with the passing of the six-horse stage-coach,

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

and the fringed gauntlets, and the long cracking whip, there has not also passed the spirit of old days. A deal of "dog" can be put on with a gasolene buggy—though "dog" is hardly the word, perhaps, considering the skill. It was an exhibition in handling a car for the onlookers, nonchalantly proffered, even as the handlers of the ribbons used to offer their exhibitions in horseman's ease.

But the amazing thing to Mamie was how the city of Skookum vanished. It wavered past on either hand and was wiped off the landscape. Nothing was before them but the plain—the road going straight across; and at the road's end a belt of timber came apparently bodily to meet them. A mile ahead was a speck, developing into a rig, into a rig with three people in it, into a two-horse rig. Then vehemently it developed into a rig with two people turning their faces to the car (features invisible, just a blur, only the ovals of them, so turned, attracting attention), and a third giving evidence of his skill in keeping two rampant horses from utterly running amok.

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

And then there was just the road ahead again, ribboning under them ; the impression to the eyes was that the car reeled it up somewhere underneath, into the bonnet.

There are two kinds of everyday automobile or motor handling that, well done, deserve a paeon ; the one is the swift and gliding disentangling work on the crowded levels of a great metropolis ; the other is the wild high-speed travel over mountain and rolling prairie roads that a metropolitan would not call roads at all. To motor over them is more like being afloat than ashore. Metropolis and wilderness—they each demand ability. The ability did not escape Marnie's vision.

She was speechless. Her inclination was to make little gurgling sounds. She said afterwards that she felt like a baby with a red ribbon. The next sensation was that the belt of timber would hit them biff in the foreheads—and then they were at the timber, and the sensation changed. It was like going into some vasty cathedral built by no human hands. With a slight sway, the chassis bobbing on the springs (because

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

of a curve here), they tore into forest under the high, overhanging branches of its mighty trees. From a distance the branches had looked as though they were hardly a span's length from the ground ; the opening where the road passed into the wood seemed as low as a mouse-hole in the wainscot ; but now it seemed just to grow up suddenly. Actually, as they rushed into the timber, the first tree-branches were found to be very high overhead. Took place immediately an amendment in attitude of mind. Booming Skookum City dwindled again, in comparison, to the value of a grain of salt.

"Oh!" said Mamie, her first remark since embarking—and they were then five miles away from the hotel door, for Five Mile Plain is only five good miles from Skookum City to the Timber. "' Those men who were looking at the automobile,'" she said, hanging on to the side of the car and trying not to bob, "' will hardly have got back across the side-walk to the door yet !'"

Cyrus made a sound somewhat like the crow of a rooster. Ah me ! Will the day

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

come when all this will seem *much ado about nothing*, and the automobile be as casual as the railroad train now seems to many? Never to such as Mamie.

"Look!" she broke out, for on a tree by the roadside was a weather-stained shingle, and on the shingle was daubed, in black letters, the legend:

### SKOOKUM CITY 10 MILES

So they were five miles into the forest—five miles from Skookum City, and another five into forest.

It had been ten miles of glamour. It was all glory now as they rushed through balsam. The sensation was no longer just of a road reeling up into the bonnet. It was a rushing road still, but above it a viewless river of balsam scent poured on them. The only trouble was that Mamie could not sit still. She bobbed; she swayed; an expert horse-woman, she was astonished at herself. Cyrus grabbed her elbow and tried to hold her to the seat.

"What I want is to grab leather all the time!" she cried out, laughing and piqued.

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

Lake looked over his shoulder and grinned at her high complaint. The driver smiled; but over his shoulder he did not look. If he had done so the motor would have been like a wind-derided umbrella before he could look back again—so much scrap-iron and trimmings by the roadside. His policy seemed to be—Let her rip; with care let her rip where, if she skids, she won't hit a tree; in places where her wheels are deep in deep ruts—then let her rip more!

"Look at him," said Cyrus, and Mamie looked and admired. He was a figure for a sculptor to tackle, that man humped over the wheel, his gaze riveted on the road.

## SKOOKUM CITY 20 MILES

It was unbelievable. The yarn about the man who mistook the milestones for a cemetery seemed less wildly ridiculous! At least one could invent such a story while on a journey such as this. And then they slowed down, and with great caution crawled across a hundred yards of wet gumbo. For Mamie the whole drive was a display. It was splendid. But the great and joyous

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

core of it all was having it with Cyrus, with Cyrus at her side, clamping her to the seat from time to time.

As they slowed down, being diplomatic with that gumbo slope, she turned to him and laughed, and he laughed back in her eyes, delighted with her appreciation of Punchy's gift. For that interchange of sign of enjoyment they took advantage of the hill none too soon. Across Horse Thief Creek, at the bottom of the hill, the car gently purred and bounced upon a log-bridge, with a bowing motion came to the opposite bank, gave a curtsey, took the next slope with a sound as of a satisfied purr, changed gear. Away again she sped, now across and along a slope where the timber thinned out, bobbed on the crest, as a boat bobs, or executes one wild see-saw, on a wave top.

"Gee-whiz!" sang out Lake.

"Some view!" shouted the driver—and they shot down into it.

The view over the tops of the forest below—a view of range on range of mountains—was suddenly blotted out by the

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

descent. It was just glimpsed, and then it was a memory. Oh these record-breaking mechanics! There are two sides to their story. What a view to be only a memory! Mamie would fain have asked him to stop and chug back up-hill for that Piagah-sight again. They plunged under spreading branches, went chugging and tossing through forest till abruptly flashed up before them a light gleam between the fir-boles, and they came out on the banks of Horse Thief Creek again, at Horse Thief proper. Three shacks, a store, a bunk-house, and a roomy log-house with a shingle sign over the door :

### HORSE THIEF—25 MILES SKOOKUM CITY

That sign was the last little brother, as it were, of the other signs by the roadside; for beyond, from Horse Thief to Skookum Creek, nobody had so far bothered to put up a sign to inform (or puzzle) the squirrels.

Men in laced boots stood on the platform before the store and looked at them—and looked away as soon as Mamie glanced in their direction, trying to place themselves

## ON "HITTING THE HIGH PLACES"

as though they clustered there by accident and not really have been lured out by the crackling of the car which doubtless they had heard drawing nearer for some time, a weird, a demoniac sound (unless one knew) in the almighty quiet of their world. A man came out of the biggest wigwam and raised his hat. Lake leant out and asked if they could have a meal. That was his first mistake in the proceedings—from Mamie's point of view. So far as she was concerned they could go foodless till the pocket of Skookum Creek opened before them.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH A DREAM COMES TRUE

BEFORE going to eat, Lazy Lake (or shall we call him Leslie Lake now, drawing nearer to his home that he had of late been putting in order?) drew out the flap of his side pocket, that had, of course, been carelessly thrust inside, now wholly hiding from view the top of the volume of the classics reposing there. The old beliefs were strong in him yet, and he was chary of showing possession of any reading matter beyond a railroad folder time-table to unwinnowed humanity. In a world of, as it were, fourteen saloons to one book-store, he drew the pocket-flap over the book. He seemed to think this planet was peopled by creatures like that notorious German general who, overhearing some officers of his staff discussing and comparing

## IN WHICH A DREAM COMES TRUE

the merits of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller, remarked, "Thank Heaven, I have never risked making myself soft by reading poetry."

Cyrus, noting the motion, and realising its significance, recalled that old day in the tomato shack when Lake explained how he never mixed things up.

"There's no doubt it's a joy-ride," said Mamie, alighting after Cyrus, who held a hand to support her, "but it's a joy-ride of a pea on a fountain—that's how I feel."

Cyrus was worried.

"We could hire a horse-rig here," he suggested.

"Not likely!" said she. "Whoa," for the ground, when she put foot to it, seemed to wobble like the car, and she was stiff.

The wife of the store-keeper appeared, hearing a woman had arrived, and beckoned to her; and Mamie was led away to wash before sitting down to steaks cut, no doubt, from the beast the hide of which hung on the fence-rail. Within an hour they were forth again, and again a little group stood

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

in scrutiny of the fierce engine of their jaunt.

But this group looked upon the "gasolene buggy" with expressions different from that of the average onlooker at Skookum City. Here it received a rueful regard; they looked at it somewhat as the creator of Frankenstein looked upon his work—and master. Their pursed lips suggested that, when they did speak, they would say: "Well, we suppose it has come to stay. It's a great scheme; but what's the matter with a horse?"

The chauffeur cranked up and sat at his wheel. Mamie slid to her corner, Cyrus stepped in beside her. Only Lake kept them waiting. The chauffeur looked round expectant, negligently resting forearm on wheel. The men in the high laced boots, the men in the high-heeled shoes, remarked his ease; he was accustomed to the diabolic thing as they were to putting foot to stirrup. He was certainly, they noticed, at home in his devil-wagon. They had seen the spectacular arrival, admiring, but silent; now silently they waited to admire (with

## IN WHICH A DREAM COMES TRUE

a touch of the rueful) his departure. Still Lake tarried. Then his voice could be heard :

" You bet your life. I thought I knew your face -couldn't fix it at first. Rio Pecos. That's twenty years ago. What became of—? Huh! Too bad! There's no sense in shooting up a man like that. Yes, that's right—with the Hiram Atterberry Expedition down the tarnation old creek. Eh? No, no, you will pardon me—my niece is aboard, you see, and I'm sitting in front. The ladies don't like the smell. Eh? Oh yes—in those days our exports were empty bottles. Well, so long."

Forth he came from the log-shack in haste, clapping side-pocket, lig'ly stepped to the car, and no sooner had he touched the seat than the auto leapt away—once more to rush and hum among the firs on the maddest track ever automobile adventured on surely. It would have needed to be, as it was, a high-clearance machine, the wagon-road being merely two ruts with a hummock between. For far apart, with wide whiffle-trees, do they yoke the Western

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

horses. The near wheels follow in the track of the near horse, and directly in the track of the off-horse do the off-wheels run. The result is just that—two deep ruts and a hummock between. And as the ruts are ever going deeper, consequently the hummock mounts higher.

Since the sheriff adventured up here, no auto had passed, but she made it—for it is always "she" to the doting driver. So, in advance a little of sundown, they came on the jump, "hitting the high places only" as the driver would say, out of the woods again, and before them was the pocket. There were the spreading bases of the mountains they knew so well. There wound the track along the edges up to the Jessie Debrett. There blinked at them the scattered homes. High overhead, and far off, Mount Derry shone like amethyst and salt, and, below, Skookum Creek chugged along the valley.

The driver stayed with his task till the limit; and there, where what was left of the wagon-road lost itself in hillside, Mrs. Lake, arrayed in her Fourth of July best,

## IN WHICH A DREAM COMES TRUE

the same that she donned for Agent Stewart—you may remember—advanced to meet them, odoriferous, camphor-exhaling, and chanting high :

“I got on to it, Leslie ! I got on to it when I heard the auto-mo-beel coming nearer !” As Lake alighted she caught his arm, held him, and continued, to Cyrus and Mamie : “He said he was tired of this prison, wanted to go out. Wanted to buy a new hat for Mamie ! Wouldn’t that jar you ! I’m nobody ! When I heard that auto coming along I was on to it. I knew there was something more in the *passcar* than a new hat. Haven’t lived with him all these years without knowing when he’s got a surprise packet in the back of his eye. It was that old prison talk that put me wise that there was something. It’s a long time since he’s had a spell of calling it prison. And it wasn’t the genuwine prison talk, it sounded too much as he was acting his old self. Prison ! Shucks ! See what he’s been doing while you been gone—trees in, a corral built that you can rightly see is a corral. No more of ‘Guess that’s near

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

enough ; the snows will fetch 'em down as good as roundin' up.' How's this for improvements ? There's no Lazy Lake to this ranch by the look of things now."

Cyrus, to whom the tail end of all this was addressed, wagged his head as one impressed.

" Well, wife, here you are—and there they 'are,' " said Lake, " and there's old Mount Derry looking down on us all again."

After the ravenous travel-appetites of the four motor-tossed travellers had been appeased, Mamie must needs go over to the tomato shack with Cyrus to observe his pleasure at the slick place she had made of it.

" I'm such a child ! " she exclaimed, after he had expressed that pleasure and knelt before the stove whittling a piece of stick to set the fire a-going. " Such a child ! Long ago I wouldn't allow myself to think of anything like this ; but after that dear day when we told each other how it was—up there on the mountain—after that, and when you went away, why then I played at it all.

## IN WHICH A DREAM COMES TRUE

As I pottered here, or sat there reading," she nodded toward the chair, " I used to play to myself that you were just out in the orchard, or that we had a big crop and you were down in Spokane arranging a market—oh, all sorts of plays I made. Sometimes it was that the apples were ripening, and you were sitting out there under a tree with a table, writing—but always you were just coming in. What Punchy Jones said is so true; I feel it now so much, when you're really here, as I pictured it all."

He had got the fire alight and stood up.

" I've been so lonely without you," she said. " I've played at you coming back so often. One day when I was walking to the door, leaving the shack to go back home again, I pretended that I wasn't going out after all, that I was stepping there to meet you—this felt home to me—and I said: ' Hullo, Cyrus ! ' right out loud ! " She gave a little laugh. " And then I thought: ' I'd better quit this.' I was wearying to see you again."

He put his hands on her shoulders and drew her to him; then he took her face between

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

his palms and, stooping, kissed her, she holding up her head to him, entirely content.

"That's what you did in my play to myself, too—just like that," she whispered.

What he had written to her from up beyond Hazelton he now spoke.

"God bless you," he said.

And her written response she now spoke, face to face with him, so that he could look down into her eyes and feel how sacred was the trust upon him.

"He has," said she.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ALL'S WELL

ON the day following that upon which it was casually, but none the less with radiant seriousness, proclaimed to those whom it might concern that Cyrus and Mamie were man and wife, they departed for a celebrating round trip through their own land.

Mamie had, so recently, so greatly, wearied for him to come back, had so often imagined them man and wife, side by side, until it seemed not imagination but fact, that when she did find herself sitting beside him rolling through America in an observation car (they were unanimous in the desire to see their own country first), she could hardly believe it. If he had not, as they say, money to burn, he could travel in his own country (you know it is cheaper for an American, much cheaper

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

for an American of the East, to go to Europe and back than to tour in his own United States); he was able to see her in the best hotels at the stop-off places. She leant across the table at one of these, and seriously said to him : " I don't think we should go to the swellest hotel in every town."

" Why not ? " he asked. " I want to do you well."

" A second grade one would do," she answered. " Between second and first grade there is often not much difference except the charge."

" There must be nothing like meanness," he assured her.

" Well, a bit of economy then," she suggested, " for the more we spend this way the more will you have to think of other schemes to bring in the money besides the work you want to do, for the big sums won't be regular—you won't be in the field all the time, and you say yourself you must go to the big libraries and read up as well."

" You're very keen on my work, dearest," he said, looking at her with thanksgiving.

She gave a little snort.

## ALL'S WELL

"I never have any patience with these women in some books that get jealous of their husband's work. We'll go to a second grade hotel in the next town," and she whispered so that the benign waiter advancing upon them would not hear, "I've learnt all about the cutlery anyhow! Even supposing it got mixed up I could select the next tool with my eyes shut. There's nothing in it."

"Absolutely nothing," he said, with a smile.

But at the Grand Cañon (they came home that way, by Albuquerque, Denver, doubled through to Salt Lake, and so back to Skookum Creek) there seemed to be only the one hotel. At the next table to them, with her back toward them, was a rustling lady who would not be satisfied. Her husband, a pervy, worried man, had a look that suggested he was on the verge of thinking "I wish I'd let her have her own way!" yet grimly hanging on to: "Be damned if I do!" These two rose before Cyrus and Mamie were finished, and the grand but peevish lady suddenly started, looked at Archer. Yes, she had a distinct

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

dash of peevishness, and a hint of flamboyance ; her chiselled features had a slightly supercilious expression ; there are those who would have described her as " patrician." There was really a good dash of vulgarity—and not the jolly kind.

" Well, Cyrus ! " she cried.

His brows puckered, but he stood up and bowed.

" Fancy meeting you here ! " she exclaimed. " This is my husband—Mr. Archer. I've told you about Cyrus, an old flame of mine."

She showed perfect teeth in a smile. The nervous husband bowed and bowed again, and a third time. A passing waiter cast him a glance as if he were sorry for him. These fellows size up the tourists. Archer extended his hand and the two shook.

" I—er—I am happy to meet you," said Dulcie's husband.

" This is my wife," and Cyrus introduced Mamie.

" Isn't it terrible down here ? " asked Dulcie of her. " Your husband is dragging you around too, I see."

## ALL'S WELL

Mamie apparently did not quite understand.

"I wanted to go to Europe this year," announced Dulcie. "I suppose one must let one's husband have his own way sometimes, but all I can say about the Southwest is that it's awful hot."

She turned to Cyrus as if talking without desiring a response.

"Leg all right now?" she said.

"Leg? Oh yes, forgotten all about it, thank you."

"And forgotten all about the—what was it—ugly little thing?"

"Homely little thing," corrected Mamie. "Couldn't you have guessed it when you saw me?" she added.

The lady, who looked as if her trouble was that she was bored with over-pampering, merely stared; but perhaps she had her qualities, for after a second or two her eyes seemed to soften.

"That was my aunt's nick-name," Mamie explained. "She tacked it on to me to keep me from youthful vanity."

Petted Dulcie decided to be amiable, and

## CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

allowed: "Your aunt's eyesight must have been faulty."

So Mamie did not say what she had been ready to say: "I really was awfully homely; and I might have stopped that way if it hadn't been for Cyrus." She did not say that. It was a happy world. But when Dulcie's husband stammered: "I saw that note about you the other day in the paper," recalling how Dulcie had sneered at his work, cause now of many notes in the papers, she asked: "Which paper? There have been so many."

"Let me see now. Can't remember now, can't remember now," said the poor man.

He was harassed. Next year he would not suggest to his wife to see America first; she could go to Europe with his blessing, for three months, and he would have a quiet fortnight some place in the Alleghanys.

The brief chatter ended; they bowed each to each; and after they sat down again, Cyrus a little uncomfortable, Mamie put him at ease.

"Cyrus," she said, leaning across the table. She put him at ease all round. For

## ALL'S WELL

once she was not humble, and also—well, she put him at his ease otherwise too. "I'm better for you than she would have been," she whispered, with a little definite nod. And she looked right into his eyes with tremendous friendliness and understanding.

All that he could do, after a quick glance from left to right to make sure that neither guests nor waiters would observe, was just firmly and tenderly to touch with his hand her beloved hands on the table before her.



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